



The Global Alcohol Policy Alliance (GAPA) Response to the UN Political Declaration on NCDs

GAPA welcomes the calling of the High Level Meeting on NCDs by the United Nations General Assembly. We are hopeful that Heads of State will meet the challenge by offering strong leadership and concerted action to reduce the burden of NCDs and promote the health and well being of the world's population. The first priority of any government should be the health and well being of its people.

GAPA's mission is to reduce alcohol related harm worldwide by promoting science - based policies independent of commercial interests.

GAPA welcomes the Declaration's specific commitment to *Promote the implementation of the WHO Global Strategy to Reduce the Harmful Use of Alcohol* and supports the full range of policy options.

GAPA also welcomes and endorses the recommendation that calls upon WHO to assist Member States to raise awareness of the problems caused by the harmful use of alcohol by young people. In 2007 the World Development Report stated:

“The developing world's 1.3 billion young people aged 12-24 are its next generation of economic and social actors... As a result of epidemiological transition from communicable to non-communicable diseases... young people are exposed to a different range of health risks than before.”

Alcohol is a major contributor to the health risks of young people, including premature mortality, injury and, in the longer term, mental ill health and dependence.

Whilst the Political Declaration acknowledges that the global burden of NCDs constitutes one of the major challenges in the 21st Century and calls for “effective responses” and for “greater measures” to prevent and control NCDs, there are areas where it could be more explicit in the measures governments and the UN need to take. WHO Europe in its Regional Framework on alcohol stated that the ability of governments to use some of the most effective tools to prevent and reduce alcohol related harm had been substantially weakened due to trade agreements. Also SEARO and WPRO Regional Committees have mentioned the hindrance to implement effective alcohol policy due to trade liberalization. The report of the WHO Commission on Social Determinants recommended caution be applied in the consideration of new global, regional and bilateral economic (trade and investment) policy commitments. However, the UN Political Declaration is silent on this issue.

In addition to the failure to address this vital issue, the challenge of restricting the oversupply and marketing by the global alcohol industry has not been addressed. Market analysts concur that the industry is highly innovative and the sophisticated marketing helps recruit young people to drinking and to influence them to drink more. New product development is a vital factor in its profitability. It has targeted young female drinkers with its alcopops.

WHO Africa Regional Committee (June 2010) stated:

“There is need to regulate the content and scale of alcohol marketing and the promotion of alcoholic beverages, in particular sponsorship, product placement, as well as internet and promotional merchandising strategies”.

It goes on to say *“no other product so widely available for consumer use accounts for so much premature death and disability as alcohol”.*

GAPA believes the alcohol industry must comply with national and international laws and regulations to implement public health friendly policy. However, policies concerning alcohol need to be formulated by public health interests without interference from commercial interests.

GAPA concurs with the NCD Alliance concern that failure by the UN to address the conflict of interest between commercial corporations and public health policy will undermine the effectiveness of this initiative to reduce NCDs. National and international governmental bodies and the NGO movement must recognize that the need to promote global increases in sales of products such as alcohol means that the industry cannot be engaged in partnership in the effort to reduce harm.

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15 September 2011