

For Immediate Release



## **Memorandum of Understanding with WHO makes AUB Global Knowledge Hub on Waterpipe Consumption**

Beirut, Lebanon- 14-1-2016 The American University of Beirut has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Convention Secretariat of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control making AUB the global knowledge hub for waterpipe smoking, in particular with respect to education, research, and the dissemination of information that contributes to the implementation of the Convention.

Tobacco consumption remains the biggest cause of preventable death worldwide. Results of anti-tobacco measures have been uneven and, in the eastern Mediterranean region, including Lebanon, tobacco consumption remains high. Despite increasing development, waterpipe use has in the meantime been on the rise, not only in the region but worldwide. As part of its tobacco control program, the WHO has selected AUB as its partner and global focal point in information generation and dissemination toward policy and measures countering the rising interest in waterpipe use.

“The American University of Beirut represents a symbol of the determination to place learning and rational thought at the heart of society, and we should be grateful to all those - faculty and students - who make this dream a reality,” said Dr. Vera Da Costa E Silva, the Head of the Secretariat of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC), during a two-day visit of AUB starting on January 14. In addition to signing the MoU, Dr. Da Costa E Silva is meeting with faculty and administration at the University who work on research and communicating to other partners, including the Lebanese government, information and advice on this important matter.

Not a new phenomenon in the region, waterpipe smoking has become associated with café culture. “Unfortunately, the trend of waterpipe smoke has been on the rise particularly amongst the youth. Many users believe that water-pipe tobacco smoke is somehow less harmful than smoke from cigarettes, suggesting we have a huge educational challenge ahead of us. Just for the record, water-pipe smoke contains carbon monoxide, polyhydrocarbons, formaldehyde, nitrogen, nitric acid and nicotine, as well as arsenic, chromium and lead. However they enter the body, these are not good for human health,” said Dr. Da Costa E Silva.

In his turn, President of AUB, Dr. Fadlo R. Khuri, assured the WHO representative that AUB will continue to work with WHO at every step of this cooperation initiative. He also confirmed a plan to make the whole of AUB campus tobacco-free by the end of 2017.

“We have an outstanding group of tobacco-related researchers. We have fought vigorously against the use of tobacco and we have world class leaders in waterpipe research in our faculties of health sciences, medicine, arts and sciences and engineering,” said Dr. Khuri.

The President of AUB, himself an oncologist who has dedicated much of his research and career to battling tobacco-related cancers explained that more than 40% of cancers are related to tobacco use. The majority of pulmonary diseases that are respiratory, such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), are related to tobacco. Close to 50% of cardiovascular and vascular disease is related to tobacco.

“One of the most insidious and subtle dangerous forms of tobacco utilization with one of the most rapid rates of growth is in fact related to the waterpipe and it is becoming multigenerational. We have severely restricted the areas where there is smoking and we intend to make AUB completely tobacco free in all its types with the tight timeline of 24 months,” said Dr. Khuri.

Dr. Ghazi Zaatari, Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs, Professor, and Chairman of the Department of Pathology & Laboratory Medicine at AUB’s Faculty of Medicine has been working with WHO for more than 11 years on the WHO Tobacco Free Initiative and more recently with the Convention Secretariat of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. Also Chair of the WHO Study Group on Tobacco Product Regulation (TobReg), Dr. Zaatari spoke to us about the signing of the memorandum with WHO. “This is a landmark achievement for AUB because it capitalizes on the work that has been done by so many faculty members on tobacco control specifically targeting the waterpipe. The establishment of a knowledge hub on this subject further widens the platform of work done at AUB to make it more visible on the world scene and simultaneously promote the knowledge and effective means to curb this rapidly growing epidemic,” said Dr. Zaatari.

WHO representative in Lebanon, Dr. Elissar Radi, also attended the agreement signing and told us about WHO’s partnership with AUB. “We have very longstanding collaborations with AUB on all public health issues particularly with tobacco. AUB has been a pioneer in providing evidence and in advocacy work for the tobacco law,” said Dr. Radi. “Next steps will include, first, the reinforcement of implementing the tobacco law, and second, enforcing effecting taxation on tobacco to allow for a more enabling environment for tobacco cessation. The Lebanese government has officially expressed its will and cooperation in this regard. We need to translate this into operational commitment.”

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Note for media: Dr. Vera Da Costa E Silva will be available for media interviews on 15 January 2016 - kindly contact Dr. Ghazi Zaatari if you are interested.  
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**Note to Editors**

**About AUB**

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards,

and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 700 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 8,500 students. AUB currently offers more than 120 programs leading to bachelor's, master's, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full-service 420-bed hospital.

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