ASH ACTION ON SMOKING & HEALTH

Dedicated to ZERO Tobacco Deaths

ASH written statement / 49th ECDD Information Meeting

16 Oct 2026

Written statement by Action on Smoking and Health (ASH)

49th WHO Expert Committee on Drug Dependence - Public Information Meeting, 19 October 2026

Subject: the notification by the Republic of Palau concerning nicotine (10 June 2026)

Chair, distinguished members of the Committee,

Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) has worked since 1967 for legal and policy measures to end the global tobacco epidemic. We submit this statement with the attached open letter, signed by more than 100 organisations in 47 countries across all six WHO regions, in support of the Republic of Palau's request for a critical review of nicotine.

The signatories are not a single constituency. They include cancer leagues; respiratory, urology and dental societies; teachers, psychologists and patient groups; organisations working with young people; and regional alliances spanning Africa, the Americas, Europe and South-East Asia. They range from the Coalition for a Tobacco-Free Palau to the NCD Alliance and The International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease. Between them, they see nicotine dependence where it begins: in classrooms, clinics, dental chairs and quit lines.

What unites them is a question of fairness. Most countries cannot assess each new nicotine product on their own; WHO reports that around 160 countries have no specific regulation for nicotine pouches. An independent critical review by this Committee would give every country, whatever its size or resources, the same scientific basis on which to protect its people.

Independence matters here. Those who profit from nicotine have every interest in how this question is answered. That is precisely why it should be answered by this Committee, on the evidence, under its established criteria.

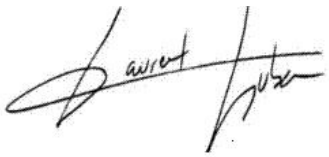
For ASH, this is also a matter of rights. Every child has the right to the highest attainable standard of health (Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 24). Protecting that right starts with knowing, on independent evidence, what nicotine does.

We join Palau in asking the Committee to take nicotine forward to a critical review at its earliest opportunity, and to assess it against the criteria it applies to any substance. We do not prejudge

the outcome. Our organisations stand ready to help Member States contribute data through the questionnaire, and to support the Committee's work with the evidence and expertise we hold.

In Palau, they say it takes only a twig to bring a pot to boil. Over one hundred organisations in 47 countries have now added theirs.

Sincerely,



Laurent Huber
Executive Director

Attached: open letter "Supporting Palau's request for an independent review of nicotine", with the list of signatory organisations in Annex 1.

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Supporting Palau's request for an independent review of nicotine

October 15, 2026

To: The Members of the WHO Expert Committee on Drug Dependence

c/o the ECDD Secretariat, World Health Organization, Geneva

Dear Members of the Committee,

For the first time, a government has asked for nicotine to be reviewed by this Committee.

On 10 June 2026, the Republic of Palau formally notified the Secretary-General of the United Nations, setting in motion the procedure for a critical review of nicotine by this Committee. We, the undersigned organisations, warmly welcome this initiative and offer it our full support.

Nicotine is the common thread. Tobacco kills more than 7 million people every year, and its products are used by more than a billion people.[1] Nicotine is the principal addictive agent in tobacco and nicotine products.[2] WHO warns that it is highly addictive and harmful, especially for children and young people whose brains are still developing.[3] Increasingly, the concern is the molecule itself. Nicotine is now sold in its own right, in tobacco-free formats that are just as addictive and reach many people who have never smoked; leading cardiovascular societies agree that no nicotine-containing product can be considered safe for the heart.[4] E-cigarette use in pregnancy is also associated with preterm birth and lower birth weight.[5]

The products that deliver nicotine are changing faster than the rules that govern them. At least 15 million children aged 13-15 already use e-cigarettes, nine times the adult rate in countries with data.[6] Nicotine pouch sales passed 23 billion units in 2024, up more than 50% in a single year. Around 160 countries have no specific rules for pouches.[7]

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1 WHO. *Tobacco and nicotine*. Fact sheet, 26 June 2026. https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/tobacco

2 WHO Study Group on Tobacco Product Regulation. *Report on the scientific basis of tobacco product regulation: tenth report of a WHO study group*. WHO Technical Report Series No. 1066. Geneva: WHO; 2025, §2.3.3.1. https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240117488

3 WHO. *Tobacco and nicotine*. Fact sheet, 26 June 2026. https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/tobacco

4 Münzel T, Kuntic M, Keaney JF Jr, et al. Nicotine-containing products and the cardiovascular system: mechanisms and global health implications. *Nat Rev Cardiol* (2026). https://doi.org/10.1038/s41569-026-01331-6

5 Vallée A, Eid M, Feki A, Ayoubi JM. Maternal vaping and pregnancy adverse outcomes: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Women Birth* 2025;38(5):101951. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wombi.2025.101951; Sukhato K, et al. Comparative effects of electronic cigarettes and dual use of electronic and conventional cigarettes on adverse pregnancy outcomes: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *BMC Public Health* 2025;25:4359. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-025-25765-8

6 WHO. World No Tobacco Day 2026: Unmasking the appeal – countering nicotine and tobacco addiction. 17 October 2025. https://www.who.int/news/item/17-10-2025-world-no-tobacco-day-2026--unmasking-the-appeal---countering-nicotine-and-tobacco-addiction

7 WHO. WHO warns nicotine pouch brands targeting youth as sales surge. News release, 15 May 2026. https://www.who.int/news/item/15-05-2026-who-warns-nicotine-pouch-brands-targeting-youth-as-sales-surge

Palau speaks from experience. In 2023, it removed e-cigarettes from its market, yet new products delivering the same addictive molecule keep arriving. Regulating one product at a time can no longer keep pace.

WHO has stressed that the true risks of these products will only become clear through a sustained commitment to impartial assessment.[8] The Committee's established criteria are precisely the questions that matter for nicotine today:

- its dependence potential;
- its liability to abuse;
- the seriousness of its impact on public health;
- its usefulness in medical therapy, including its established role in helping people quit.

Assessing nicotine on the same scientific basis as other substances would give every country, whatever its size or resources, a shared scientific reference point.

This initiative complements the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. It is in the spirit of the Convention's Article 2.1, which encourages Parties to go beyond its requirements in order to better protect human health.[9]

We trust the Committee to examine the evidence with the independence and rigour for which it is known. Our organisations stand ready to support that work with the evidence and expertise we hold.

The children now starting on nicotine, through products their parents never knew, will live with the consequences for decades. They deserve decisions grounded in the best independent science we have.

Yours faithfully,

Action on Smoking and Health and 102 Signatories (full list in Annex 1)

PREPARED IN COLLABORATION BY

ASH ACTION ON SMOKING & HEALTH

ENSP European Network for Smoking and Tobacco Prevention

impact UNFILTERED

8 WHO. *WHO position on tobacco control and harm reduction*. 12 November 2025. https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/who-position-on-tobacco-control-and-harm-reduction

9 WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control,Article2.1. Geneva:WHO;2003. https://fctc.who.int/resources/publications/9241591013

Annex 1 - Signatory organisations

103 organisations in 47 countries, listed in alphabetical order.

#	Organisation	Country
1	A Non Smoking Generation	Sweden
2	ADIC Sri Lanka - Alcohol and Drug Information Center	Sri Lanka
3	Afghanistan NCD Alliance	Afghanistan
4	African Tobacco Control Alliance (ATCA)	Togo
5	American College of Chest Physicians	United States
6	American Thoracic Society	United States
7	APEPOC (Asociación de Pacientes con EPOC)	Spain
8	ASH (Action on Smoking and Health)	United States
9	ASH Canada	Canada
10	ASH PHILIPPINES	Philippines
11	ASH Scotland	United Kingdom
12	Asociación Oncológica Extremeña	Spain
13	Asociatia Aer Pur Romania	Romania
14	Association for Nonsmokers - MN	United States
15	Association of European Cancer Leagues (ECL)	Belgium
16	ATAEX (Asociación de Afectados por Tabaquismo en Extremadura)	Spain
17	Austrian Council on Smoking and Health	Austria
18	Beacon of excellence for consulting,training and professional development	Jordan
19	Belgian Alliance pour une Société sans Tabac	Belgium
20	Cambodia Movement For Health	Cambodia
21	Cedars Refuge Foundation	Nigeria
22	Center for Tobacco and the Environment	United States
23	CLAS - Coalition for Americas' Health	United States
24	Coalition for a Tobaccco Free Palau	Palau
25	Coalition for Respiratory Health from Moldova	Moldova
26	Coastal Communities Drug Free Coalition	United States
27	Comité national contre le tabagisme	France
28	Consejo general de dentistas	Spain
29	Consumers Association of Penang,(CAP)	Malaysia
30	Corporate Accountability	United States
31	Costa Rica Saludable	Costa Rica
32	Danish Cancer Society	Denmark
33	Danish Society for Public Health	Denmark
34	Danske Tandplejere	Denmark
35	Dentistry against Tobacco, Sweden	Sweden
36	DNF-Demain sera Non-Fumeur	France
37	Doctors against Tobacco	Sweden
38	European Association of Urology	Netherlands
39	European Chronic Disease Alliance	Belgium
40	European Network for Smoking and Tobacco Prevention- ENSP	Belgium
41	European Respiratory Society Tobacco Control Committee	Belgium
42	Foundation Smart Health - Health in 3D	Poland

#	Organisation	Country
43	Fowenguep Foundation	Cameroon
44	Fundación Bolivia Saludable	Bolivia
45	Fundación Interamericana del Corazón Argentina - FIC Argentina	Argentina
46	Fundación Lovexair	Spain
47	Global Allergy & Asthma Patient Platform	Austria
48	Global Alliance for Tobacco Control	Canada
49	Grand Est Sans Tabac	France
50	Green Crescent Health Development Initiative	Nigeria
51	Green Crescent Zimbabwe	Zimbabwe
52	Grupo de Tabaquismo Sociedad Extremeña de Medicina Familiar y Comunitaria	Spain
53	Health Funds for a Smokefree Netherlands	Netherlands
54	Health Professionals against Tobacco	Sweden
55	HealthJustice	Philippines
56	HEALTHY ROMANIA GENERATION 2035 ASSOCIATION	Romania
57	Hellenic Thoracic Society	Greece
58	Hospital general de Fuerteventura	Spain
59	Impact Unfiltered	Netherlands
60	Kenya Tobacco Control Alliance (KETCA)	Kenya
61	King Hussein Cancer Center	Jordan
62	Korea Center for Tobacco Control Research and Education	South Korea
63	Kosovo Advocacy and Development Centre (KADC)	Kosovo
64	Lärare mot Tobak, Teachers against Tobacco	Sweden
65	Macedonian Respiratory Society	North Macedonia
66	Malaysian Women's Action for Tobacco Control and Health (MyWATCH)	Malaysia
67	MANAS (Madak o Nesha Nirodh Sangstha)	Bangladesh
68	National Initiative of Non-smokers of Serbia - NINS	Serbia
69	NCD Alliance	Switzerland
70	NEBISI	Georgia
71	Nofumadores.org	Spain
72	ONG LA GRANDE PUISSANCE DE DIEU	Benin
73	Psykologer mot tobak	Sweden
74	Public Health Advocacy Institute	United States
75	Public Health Association of Fiji	Fiji
76	RENATA (Red Nacional Antitabaco)	Costa Rica
77	Renevlyn Development Initiative	Nigeria
78	Respiratoire Gezondheid (VRGT)	Belgium
79	Romanian Society of Pneumology	Romania
80	School for Moral Ambition	Netherlands
81	SEPAR (Sociedad Española de Neumología y Cirugía Torácica)	Spain
82	Servicio extremeño de salud	Spain
83	Slovenian Coalition for Public Health, Environment and Tobacco Control	Slovenia
84	Smoke Free Israel	Israel
85	Smoke Free Partnership	Belgium

#	Organisation	Country
86	Society for Oral Cancer and Health	India
87	Southeast Asia Tobacco Control Alliance	Thailand
88	Stichting Rookpreventie Jeugd (Youth Smoking Prevention)	Netherlands
89	Stoplinien	Denmark
90	Swedish Nurses Against Tobacco	Sweden
91	Te Ao Hurihuri	New Zealand
92	The International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease	France
93	The Welfare Association for the Development of Afghanistan (WADAN)	Afghanistan
94	TIME - for a nicotine-free future	Germany
95	Tobacco Control Alliance of Georgia	Georgia
96	Tobacco Control Research Group, Centre for 21st Century Public Health, University of Bath, UK	United Kingdom
97	Tobacco Free Association of Zambia	Zambia
98	Tobacco Free Jordan	Jordan
99	TobaccoFree Research Institute Ireland	Ireland
100	Tobaksfakta	Sweden
101	Vapen #jouwkeuze	Netherlands
102	VISIR (Riksförbundet Vi Som Inte Röker)	Sweden
103	Vital Strategies	United States