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MEDIA RELEASE

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**SPEECH TO THE PLENARY SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
HIGH LEVEL MEETING ON NON-COMMUNICABLE DISEASES**

**19 September 2011
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E&OE

Australia is delighted to be participating in this historic UN meeting on the global challenge of non-communicable diseases.

NCDs pose a growing threat – to our health systems, our societies, and our economies. And because NCDs strike already disadvantaged communities and countries harshly, the threat of NCDs risks further entrenching poverty and disadvantage around the world.

In Australia's own backyard, the Pacific has some of the highest rates of NCDs in the world.

So we must act now, or too many people will continue to suffer and die from illnesses that are, by and large, preventable – and our health systems won't cope.

The Australian Government is strongly committed to action on non-communicable diseases – internationally and at home.

In Australia, we have put prevention of chronic disease, and strengthening our primary care system to better treat non-communicable diseases, at the very core of our Government's health reform agenda.

We are taking action on a range of fronts: through research and social marketing campaigns, and support for preventative health efforts across governments, industry, and the broader community.

We are also providing support to developing countries to prevent and better control NCDs, especially in our own region, the Pacific.

At the global level, I am pleased to announce today that Australia will provide a further A\$4 million to the World Health Organization to implement its *Action Plan for the Global Strategy for the Prevention and Control of NCDs*.

Australia will also build on our existing work on NCDs in the Pacific with a \$25 million commitment to help Pacific Island countries tackle these problems – focused on building the evidence base for effective interventions and cost-effective prevention strategies, as well as working to ensure we help address the wider social determinants of health.

Today, I want to talk to you about a particular issue which is a major focus for Australia: tobacco. Unlike most other risk factors for NCDs, the evidence on tobacco is crystal clear. We know the harms, the research evidence is unequivocal.

If we don't take steps to tackle tobacco, the WHO estimates that the number of people dying each year from tobacco related illness will rise from nearly 6 million per year currently, to more than 8 million by 2030.

Australian Governments have for many years been tough on smoking by world standards. We are now taking this strong record of comprehensive action further through the introduction of the world's first tobacco plain packaging laws – taking up the WHO challenge to take this next step.

From next year, all tobacco products sold in Australia will be required to have the same packaging in an unattractive drab dark brown colour. Graphic health warnings will cover most of the pack.

Australia is the first country to have taken this step. As a result, the Big Tobacco giants are fighting desperately: through multi-million dollar advertising campaigns, and threats of legal action.

They are fighting vigorously because they know plain packaging will hurt them by reducing sales. And they know if Australia succeeds in being the first country to implement these laws, we won't be the last.

The Australian Government is very confident that we can withstand these threats and challenges. In fact, the more the tobacco companies fight, the more we know we are on the right track.

Fighting back against Big Tobacco does require resources, and political will. But saving lives and improving the health of the global community is an investment that will pay a huge dividend.

And so today I urge all of you to consider how your country can take the next steps too, using the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control as the mechanism for reform. The fight against Big Tobacco is one which together, we will win.

For more information, contact the Minister's Office on (02) 6277 7220