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World COPD Day on 18 November, 2015

Forum of International Respiratory Societies (FIRS) asks governments to strengthen prevention and management strategies to reduce the burden of Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)

Cape Town, Glenview, Lausanne, Montevideo, New York, Paris, Tokyo, 18 November, 2015. World COPD Day is observed each year in November to highlight the burden of this chronic respiratory disease affecting more than 200 million people globally and causing about 3 million deaths annually. COPD is the sixth major cause of death and disability in low- and middle income countries and is projected to become the third cause of death by 2020. The economic burden is enormous, in the US alone total costs for COPD were estimated to be about 50 billion USD in 2010.

Risk factors for COPD other than tobacco smoking (active and passive) are increasingly recognized: they include among others occupational dusts and chemicals, indoor air pollution from cooking and heating with biomass in badly ventilated homes, outdoor air pollution and aging.

Patients with COPD have an increased risk for cardiovascular diseases, osteoporosis, respiratory infections, diabetes, anxiety and depression and lung cancer.

Diagnosis and adequate treatment of COPD are currently not available in many low and middle income countries. Spirometry is essential for a proper COPD diagnosis. Unfortunately this diagnostic tool is underutilized or not available in many health care settings. Patients should also have access to comprehensive treatment including smoking cessation programmes, medication for symptom relief and prevention of exacerbations, pulmonary rehabilitation and oxygen therapy as prescribed. It is critical that good quality medicines are available at affordable prices to all patients.

FIRS is dedicated to raise awareness among politicians, policy makers, clinicians, public health specialists, funding agencies and the general public. "COPD can be prevented and treated" said Prof Michiaki Mishima, President of FIRS, "but we need to strengthen prevention through an accelerated implementation of the WHO FCTC and MPOWER to reduce the use of tobacco in all countries and at the same time improve diagnosis and treatment strategies globally."

Governments have pledged to support the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, recently launched at the UN General Assembly in New York. “Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages” is one of the several goals of this agenda. Improved COPD prevention and control will certainly contribute to this goal and therefore governments are encouraged to invest in these areas by allocating enough realistic budgets to improve the health care infrastructure and human resources for chronic respiratory diseases and in particular for COPD.

Within the framework of the Decade of the Lung (2016 – 2025), FIRS will contribute through a coordinated action to accelerate preventive and treatment strategies globally to benefit millions of patients and to reduce the burden of COPD.

About the Forum of International Respiratory Societies (FIRS)

The Forum of International Respiratory Societies (FIRS) is an organization comprised of the world’s leading international respiratory societies working together to improve lung health globally: American Thoracic Society (ATS), American College of Chest Physicians (CHEST), Asociación Latinoamericana De Tórax (ALAT), Asian Pacific Society of Respiratory (APSR), European Respiratory Society (ERS), International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease (The Union) and the Pan African Thoracic Society (PATS). The goal of FIRS is to unify and enhance efforts to improve lung health through the combined work of its more than 70,000 members globally.