

CAMPAIGN For TOBACCO-FREE Kids®

FRAMEWORK CONVENTION ON TOBACCO CONTROL

The past twenty years has witnessed the passage of a number of historic international agreements, including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Landmine Treaty. Now, the international community is taking action on the number one cause of preventable death in the world today - tobacco.

Tobacco is truly a global problem. Over 4 million people die from tobacco-related illness each year. If current trends continue, this figure will rise to 10 million per year by the year 2030, with 70% of those deaths occurring in developing countries. Just as infectious diseases know no political boundaries, leaving individual countries incapable of effectively containing them, the tobacco epidemic also requires international cooperation if it is to be controlled. The challenges that transcend the borders of sovereign states include:

- Advances in communications technology which facilitate aggressive global marketing and promotion of tobacco products, such as over the Internet and/or on satellite television.
- Cigarette smuggling across national borders.
- The increased liberalization of trade and investment rules, which has provided tobacco companies the opportunity to expand their operations.

In order to fashion a global approach to the tobacco epidemic, the member countries of the World Health Organization (WHO) in 1999 unanimously endorsed the start of negotiations on a Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC). The FCTC will be the world's first tobacco control treaty and has the potential to have an historic impact on global public health.

Structure & Timeline

A framework convention is a type of multilateral treaty. Under this approach, countries negotiate a framework convention that calls for cooperation in achieving broadly stated goals and may contain agreements on substantive issues on which there is consensus. At the same time, they may negotiate separate protocol agreements on more technical issues. This approach has been used to address other global problems, such as climate change.

Three negotiating sessions for the FCTC have already taken place, with additional ones planned for March and October of 2002. Negotiations are scheduled to be completed by May 2003, after which the treaty will be open for ratification. The Tobacco Free Initiative (TFI), a cabinet-level project of WHO, is acting as Secretariat for the negotiations, providing administrative and operational support.

Issues Being Negotiated

The current draft treaty covers a wide range of policy measures intended to reduce tobacco-related death and disease, including measures to:

- eliminate or restrict tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship;
- clamp down on widespread tobacco smuggling;
- ban misleading tobacco descriptors such as "light" and "low tar" which imply that the products are less hazardous;
- protect people from second hand smoke;
- require prominent health warning on packages that will occupy a significant portion of the package and could contain pictures or pictograms; and
- eliminate duty free tobacco sales.

Countries negotiating the treaty have yet to reach consensus on most of these issues. Generally speaking, developing countries and those developed countries with strong tobacco control programs have favored a strong enforceable, convention while some developed countries, including the United States, continue to oppose strong measures to tackle the tobacco epidemic.

The FCTC Deserves Strong U.S. Support

As the home to the world's largest multinational tobacco company (Philip Morris), the United States has a particular responsibility to display constructive leadership and support for the FCTC. So far, unfortunately, the United States has been a negative influence in the negotiations through its continued efforts to weaken key provisions of the draft text. The US delegation has taken positions on tobacco advertising, consumer protection, trade and other issues that would protect the interests of the tobacco companies rather than promote public health.

Industry Reactions

Predictably, the FCTC has come under attack by the tobacco industry, with one executive labeling it a "developed world obsession being foisted on to the developing world". Since the negotiations began, tobacco industry representatives and front groups have fanned out across the developing world, holding meetings with legislators and the media in an attempt to derail the process. Ignoring the fact that the FCTC will be the product of negotiations among sovereign states, the industry is charging that the FCTC will usurp the ability of governments to determine national tobacco control policies. And, it continues to try to scare governments into believing that the FCTC will be economically ruinous, despite the findings by the World Bank and others that tobacco control measures are good both for public health and the economy.

The FCTC's Potential

The negotiation and implementation of the FCTC could make an enormous contribution to stemming the growth of the tobacco epidemic by fostering multilateral cooperation on aspects of tobacco control that transcend national boundaries, such as the global marketing of tobacco products and smuggling. The Convention process will also raise national and international

awareness, as well as technical and financial resources for effective national tobacco control measures. In addition to the specific benefits of the Convention and related protocols, the process leading to the passage of the FCTC is likely to:

- Give new impetus to efforts to strengthen national legislation and action to control the harm caused by tobacco.
- Help mobilize national and global technical and financial support for tobacco control.
- Bring new ministries, including those dealing with foreign affairs and finance, more deeply into the tobacco control effort.
- Mobilize non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other members of civil society in support of stronger tobacco control.
- Raise public awareness of marketing tactics used by multinational tobacco companies.

In order to support the development of a strong FCTC and combat tobacco industry disinformation, an alliance of NGOs from around the world has been formed. Now comprising more than 160 groups from over 70 countries, the Framework Convention Alliance is playing a key role in educating policymakers and strengthening cooperation across borders.

Useful Web-Sites

Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids

<http://tobaccofreekids.org/campaign/global/>

Framework Convention Alliance

<http://www.fctc.org>

WHO Tobacco Free Initiative

<http://tobacco.who.int/>

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