

2010: Year of the Lung marks anniversary of Tobacco Control Treaty

- History-making tobacco treaty now five years old

26 February 2010: It is now five years since the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) came into effect, marking an important milestone in public health history.

The Framework Convention Alliance (FCA) is pleased with the FCTC's global impact to date. Already, 168 out of 195 eligible parties have joined the treaty through ratification or accession, and more are set to join.

As a result many countries have implemented effective evidence based measures to decrease prevalence of tobacco use and save lives through banning tobacco advertising and sponsorship; through protecting citizens from tobacco smoke exposure; and through mandating pictorial warnings on cigarette packs.

The FCTC is a remarkable achievement because:

- It is the first treaty negotiated under the auspices of the WHO, a resounding recognition that international law has a critical role to play in global health.
- The treaty catalysed global action, elevating the importance of tobacco control as a global health and political issue, stimulating policy change at the domestic level and bringing new public and private resources into the field.
- The FCTC Conference of the Parties (COP) adopted strong guidelines on four of the convention's key substantive articles, and work is underway on the development of a number of other guidelines and a protocol.

However, for each success there is an equally difficult ongoing challenge because universal FCTC implementation is still far away, particularly with respect to tobacco taxation, control of illicit trade of tobacco products and any measures that require resources, such as public education and cessation.

Richer parties have also made no significant effort to ensure tobacco control efforts in low and middle income countries receive appropriate technical and financial assistance. FCA would like to see countries include tobacco control in their development agendas to boost funding in this crucial area.

While tobacco kills more than 5 million people a year, tobacco control programs are grossly underfunded.

As a result, during the next five years FCA will focus on improving FCTC implementation and increasing resources to adequately fund implementation of measures and policies that are compliant with the treaty.

FCA would also like to see more stringent measures in place such as 90 per cent graphic warnings on cigarette packages; bans on cigarette package displays and duty free tobacco sales; generic packaging; higher tobacco taxes; more cessation methods; and an effective protocol on illicit trade in tobacco products.

FCA director Laurent Huber said that over the past five years, the number of deaths caused by tobacco has increased and not decreased.



“Tobacco use remains high in low and middle income countries and it is increasing among women and young people,” he said. “We have five years of good progress on policy but deaths due to tobacco use continue to rise. Governments need to fund their policy promises to stem the tide of tobacco deaths.”

FCA would also like to see tobacco control treated as a development issue because the tobacco epidemic is shifting rapidly from developed to developing countries. Tobacco addiction is a tremendous burden to poor families because it diverts money from necessities such as food and education into the pockets of the tobacco industry. Subsequent diseases from tobacco use consume already scarce health care resources.

Despite this, tobacco control has yet to make its way onto the global development agenda and receives no mention in the UN’s Millennium Development Goals. If tobacco control is treated as a global after-thought, development in the world’s poorer countries will be handicapped by rapid rises in tobacco-caused disease for decades to come.

“Our attitude should not be one of doing the bare minimum, but we should utilise the FCTC as a mechanism to escalate tobacco control efforts in order to save lives,” said Huber. “The tobacco industry is alive and well, but health is still lagging behind. FCA challenges Parties to put action to intention, to do more, do what is needed and do it faster.”

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