

PRESS RELEASE

Nations can save lives and cut losses of billions of US dollars by deciding this week to work on a new international treaty to combat global trade in illicit tobacco products

Bangkok, July 2 2007 – This week at a global health conference, health advocates are urging governments to start negotiations on a new international treaty to combat illicit trade in tobacco products.

Representatives of 147 countries are meeting at a global health conference in Bangkok June 30-July 6 2007 to implement the international tobacco control treaty, the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control of the World Health Organization (FCTC). One of the main agenda items of the conference will be the discussion of an expert report on combating the illicit tobacco trade.

“Nations serious about protecting the health and well-being of their people should take the illicit tobacco trade very seriously. Smuggled and counterfeit cigarettes are sold at lower prices than legal products, contributing to higher consumption and greater rates of smoking-related illness and death,” said Luk Joossens, Senior Policy Advisor of the Framework Convention Alliance (FCA). “The illicit tobacco trade also deprives governments of billions of dollars of tax revenue reducing funding available for public health and other programs.”

The FCA – an international alliance of hundreds of tobacco control organisations - has estimated that, in 2006, the illicit cigarette trade accounted for 10.7% of total global trade or approximately 600 billion cigarettes sold worldwide. The yearly loss of revenue to governments - more than US\$ 40 billion - represents a sum greater than the GDP of two-thirds of the World’s countries.

Combating the illicit trade is a key provision of the world’s first international public health treaty, the FCTC, which has been ratified by 147 countries and the European Community. Tobacco control advocates at the meeting in Bangkok this week are urging FCTC parties to agree to begin work on a new international treaty aimed at saving lives and stemming losses to national budgets by eliminating illicit tobacco trade. Nations at the meeting will also be asked to contribute relatively modest funding to negotiate and implement the new treaty.

“The amount of funding needed to negotiate this treaty would be roughly equivalent to the lost revenue from just two containers of smuggled cigarettes in the European Union,” said Deborah Arnott, Board Member of FCA. “For this negligible investment nations can take an important step forward in protecting their people and curtailing lost revenue to national coffers.”

Tobacco control experts recommend an Illicit Trade Protocol that would complement the FCTC with the following provisions:

- an international tracking and tracing system of tobacco products;
- markings and codes on packs, cartons, and master cases;
- system of record keeping for all imports and exports of tobacco products;
- obligations for tobacco manufacturers to control their supply chain with penalties for those that fail to do so;
- the criminalization of participation in illicit trade in various forms;
- increased international cooperation in the sharing of information and prosecution of offences.

The Framework Convention Alliance is made up of almost 300 organizations representing over 100 countries around the world. It was created to support the development, ratification, and implementation of the WHO FCTC.

Contact: Susan Cavanagh, FCA Communications Manager, cavanagahs@fctc.org, +66814019054 during the COP, or after on +61 416 361 759.

For more information on the FCTC and the FCA, please visit www.fctc.org