

The Framework Convention on Tobacco Control

Global response to a globalised epidemic

“The WHO FCTC was developed in response to the globalization of the tobacco epidemic . . . (which) is facilitated through a variety of complex factors . . . including trade liberalization and direct foreign investment. Other factors, such as global marketing, transnational tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship, and the international movement of contraband and counterfeit cigarettes, have also contributed to the explosive increase in tobacco use.” –
Foreword to the FCTC

The Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) is the first treaty negotiated under the auspices of the World Health Organization (WHO). It was adopted unanimously by the World Health Assembly in May 2003, By November 2008, it had 160 Parties – 159 out of the 193 WHO member states and the European Community.

Parties to the FCTC have a legally binding obligation under international law to enact and implement laws, policies and programmes to reduce the demand for tobacco products and protect their citizens from exposure to tobacco smoke, on the one hand, and to control the supply of tobacco products, on the other.

The factor that makes such a binding global instrument possible is the irrefutable scientific evidence that tobacco causes a range of serious health problems and is responsible each year for millions of deaths, mainly from lung cancer and cardio-vascular disease.

The motivation for the FCTC is that the tobacco epidemic has become globalised, following in the wake of transnational tobacco advertising, marketing and sales driven by powerful multinational corporations. The only meaningful public health response is one that is well coordinated, and that rests on global implementation of effective tobacco control laws, policies and programmes.

Reducing consumption and exposure

The greater part of the FCTC is devoted to measures that governments are required to take in order to reduce tobacco demand and to protect entire populations from exposure to tobacco smoke. In particular, they are required to: Introduce pricing and tax measures that are likely to deter people from buying tobacco products. Enact laws that protect their population from exposure to tobacco smoke.

- Enact laws that compel manufacturers to print health warnings on tobacco product packaging and prohibit the use of misleading information.
- Develop programmes to inform and educate the public on the risks of tobacco use.
- Control tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship by means of strict, enforceable laws.



- Develop programmes to address tobacco dependence and assist tobacco users to break their addiction.

Controlling the supply side

Other provisions relate to measures to restrict the supply of tobacco products.

These include:

- Combating the illicit trade in tobacco products.
- Prohibiting the sale of tobacco to and by minors.
- Providing support for economically sustainable alternatives to tobacco cultivation.

Since the finalisation of the FCTC

The FCTC came into effect in February 2005, 90 days after the fortieth state became a Party. Countries continue to join as Parties to the Convention, the most recent being Costa Rica which ratified the FCTC in August 2008.

The Parties to the FCTC have organised three conferences to develop instruments to strengthen the treaty and review their record in implementing the treaty. They met in Geneva in 2006, in Bangkok in 2007 and are meeting in South Africa in November 2008.

Civil society support

From the outset, the FCA has engaged with the official process of developing and ratifying the treaty and continues to be actively involved in advocating for effective implementation.

The FCA is currently a network of more than 350 non-governmental organisations from more than 100 countries.

Strengthening the FCTC

At the first two Conferences of the Parties to the FCTC, the COP has taken strong action to advance implementation of the treaty, including through work on implementation guidelines, and deciding to negotiate a protocol on illicit trade in tobacco products.

In the foreword to the FCTC the then WHO Director General Dr Jong-wook LEE remarked: “The success of the FCTC as a tool for public health will depend on the energy and political commitment that we devote to implementing it in countries in the coming years.”

The FCA believes that this emphasis on political commitment remains valid as the Parties gather for their third conference. We look to this conference to provide clear and uncompromising action in pursuit of the goals of the FCTC.

The Framework Convention Alliance is an international network of more than 350 NGOs dedicated to achieving the goals of the FCTC