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On 10th Anniversary of Tobacco Control Treaty, Nations Are Making Progress and Must Step Up Fight Against World's Top Preventable Killer

**Statement of Matthew L. Myers
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WASHINGTON, DC – Today marks the 10th anniversary of the entry into force of [the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control \(FCTC\)](#) – the world's first treaty devoted to improving public health. In the decade since taking effect on February 27, 2005, the FCTC has spurred nations across the globe to implement proven, life-saving measures to reduce tobacco use called for by the treaty, including graphic health warnings, comprehensive smoke-free laws, higher tobacco taxes and bans on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship. It has also focused much-needed attention on the tobacco industry's relentless efforts to fight these measures and sell more of its deadly and addictive products, especially in low- and middle-income countries.

The FCTC has served as a catalyst for life-saving progress. In 2006, the WHO projected that unless nations act decisively, tobacco will kill one billion people worldwide this century. Actions taken since then have already begun to bend that arc. For the first time in decades, the total number of cigarettes sold worldwide actually declined in 2013, according to Euromonitor. [A study published by the WHO estimated that policies adopted just between 2007 and 2010 saved more than seven million lives.](#)

Nonetheless, there is an urgent need for more nations to take action and adopt more of the policies called for by the treaty. Tobacco use remains a major driving force behind the worldwide growth in non-communicable diseases such as cancer, heart disease and chronic lung disease, which have overtaken infectious diseases as the world's leading killers. Tobacco's devastating global toll is unacceptable and entirely preventable because we have proven strategies to reduce tobacco use and save lives, strategies that nations must implement as required by the FCTC.

The good news is that countries have demonstrated a strong commitment to taking action. There are now 180 parties to the treaty (179 countries and the European Union). Over the past 10 years, nations have made significant progress in implementing the science-based measures called for by the treaty:

- More than 77 countries and jurisdictions now require pictorial warnings on cigarette packs (some of these have not yet implemented the requirement). Pakistan, India, Nepal and Thailand require warnings covering 85 percent of tobacco packs.
- 43 countries have enacted 100 percent smoke-free policies applying to all workplaces and public places. Latin America and the Caribbean have been at the forefront of this effort, with 15 countries that are smoke-free.
- 29 countries have enacted complete bans on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship;
- 32 countries have implemented tobacco taxes of 75 percent or more of the price of the most widely sold cigarette brands.

We know these measures work. Countries such as Turkey and Uruguay that have implemented comprehensive policies have reported significant declines in smoking rates. It is also heartening that strong tobacco control policies have been adopted by countries with the largest numbers of smokers, including Russia, India and Bangladesh. In November, Beijing adopted a historic law that will make indoor public places and workplaces smoke-free and bans most forms of tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship. This sets the stage for strong national action in China, which is home to the largest number of smokers in the world at about 300 million.

Despite this progress, there is much more work to do. Political will to address the tobacco epidemic remains low in too many places. It is especially critical that nations step up efforts to increase tobacco taxes, which is the most direct and most effective strategy for reducing tobacco use.

The biggest obstacle to progress is the tobacco industry, which wields tremendous political influence and marketing savvy to fight tobacco control policies and addict new customers. The industry is targeting low- and middle-income countries where 80 percent of the world's smokers now live. Tobacco giants spend billions of dollars marketing their deadly products in these countries. In the latest alarming example, [Philip Morris International is conducting a global marketing campaign – called Be Marlboro – that uses themes and images that appeal to youth.](#)

Tobacco companies are also fighting nations' efforts to implement effective tobacco control policies by filing expensive lawsuits and challenging these measures as violations of trade and investment agreements, [as HBO's Last Week Tonight with John Oliver showed in a brilliant recent segment.](#) These are blatant attempts to bully countries and stop them from taking effective action to reduce tobacco use, as they are obligated to by the FCTC. Australia and Uruguay are currently defending their sovereign right to implement these measures in front of international trade arbitration panels, while other countries have faced legal threats by tobacco companies and their allies.

In the face of these obstacles, we urge governments to build on recent momentum and mark this anniversary by rededicating themselves to enacting the proven, cost-effective solutions called for by the FCTC. With a billion lives at stake, countries must be as aggressive in fighting the tobacco epidemic as the tobacco industry is in perpetuating it.

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