



Press Release

Millions of lives spared from tobacco epidemic as global tobacco control meeting closes in Seoul

Delegates at a global tobacco control meeting that ended Saturday should be congratulated for taking last-minute decisions that will spare millions of people globally from death due to tobacco use, according to the civil society Framework Convention Alliance (FCA).

Representatives of Parties to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) also stood firm against relentless efforts by the tobacco industry to steer them away from adopting measures that would tackle the tobacco epidemic. If current trends do not change, tobacco use will kill 1 billion people this century, most of them in the developing world.

Among the measures adopted by the fifth conference of the Parties (COP5) in Seoul is a set of guiding principles and recommendations that will assist the 176 Parties to the FCTC to put in place tobacco taxes to curb tobacco use. It is widely accepted that raising prices of tobacco products is the most effective way to reduce their consumption.

COP5 also adopted the Protocol on Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products (ITP). That decision lays the groundwork for increased international cooperation to fight tobacco smuggling, which is estimated to cost governments billions of dollars in tax revenue annually. It will also lead to more control of the legal tobacco trade (through licensing, record keeping, due diligence, tracing, etc), and facilitate investigations.

“FCA is delighted that COP Parties have stood firm against the tobacco industry and taken concrete decisions that will strengthen the FCTC and provide governments with more tools to fight the global epidemic,” said FCA Director Laurent Huber.

“Assisting governments to create strong tax policies, which include regular tax increases, is the most direct way to reduce tobacco use and the nearly six million deaths it causes every year,” he added.

Hours before COP closed on Saturday, Parties agreed to set up a working group that will look into ways to better access the technical assistance and financial resources that many Parties need to put the FCTC’s measures into practice. Despite growing international recognition that tobacco use is a major impediment to global health and development, implementation of the Convention has been slow in many countries, especially low- and mid-income ones. Saturday’s decision can reverse this trend and help governments in their efforts to implement the live-saving policies included in the FCTC.

Decisions taken at this week’s COP, which meets every two years, are taken by consensus by Parties to the FCTC, a legally binding treaty. The ITP will come into force after adoption by 40 Parties to the FCTC, while Parties are expected to apply the guiding principles and recommendations on tobacco taxation, as they do existing guidelines, when developing their tobacco control policies.

Despite strict rules in the FCTC that severely limit tobacco industry participation in such policy-making, FCA noted numerous cases at COP5 of industry representatives attempting to sway delegations or their governments. Some delegations even included individuals with ties to the industry.

This is a reminder, as WHO Director-General noted at the opening of COP5, that the tobacco industry will stop at nothing in its attempts to peddle its products and hook new generations of customers to replace the victims of tobacco use.

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If left unchecked, tobacco use will kill 8 million people a year by 2030, 70% of them in developing countries. FCA is working to change this. We are more than 350 organisations from over 100 countries that support the global control tobacco treaty, the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC). See how you can support our work at www.fctc.org