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COP6: Adopt draft guidelines on tobacco taxes, save hundreds of millions of lives

MOSCOW, 10 October 2014 – Governments can take an important step toward preventing hundreds of millions of premature deaths by adopting, without change, draft guidelines on tobacco taxes, says the Framework Convention Alliance (FCA).

The draft guidelines are on the agenda of the next round of negotiations of the global tobacco treaty, the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC). The sixth session of the Conference of the Parties takes place 13-18 October in Moscow. Known as COP6, the meeting brings together the 179 Parties to the FCTC, which represent nearly 90 percent of the world's people, as well as non-Parties and international and non-government organisations from around the world.

COP6 delegates gather to confront one of the world's deadliest ever epidemics. Tobacco use killed 100 million people in the 20th century and, if trends do not change, will be responsible for the deaths of 1 billion people this century. Most of those projected deaths will occur in low and middle-income countries, where the tobacco industry has shifted its efforts to recruit new smokers.

An alliance of nearly 500 civil society organisations from more than 100 countries, FCA stresses that tobacco tax policies are widely recognised as one of the most effective means of influencing demand for tobacco products.

"South Africa, Mexico, France and Brazil are examples of countries that have raised tobacco taxes and reduced smoking and the diseases and deaths that it causes," said FCA Director Laurent Huber. "The Philippines has just taken major steps to simplify its tax system, which will result in a tax increase of more than 1,000 percent on the cheapest cigarette brands by 2017.

"FCTC Parties have been working on these draft guidelines for four years: at COP6 it's time that they adopt guidelines that will help countries implement price measures to reduce the tobacco epidemic," added Huber.

Predictably, the tobacco industry has attacked the draft guidelines. "The industry has tried to mislead governments into believing the guidelines are an attack on national sovereignty," said Huber. "On the contrary, the first guiding principle of the guidelines is that 'determining tobacco taxation policies is a sovereign right of the Parties'. The draft guidelines also state explicitly that 'there is no single optimal level of tobacco taxes that applies to all countries'."

At COP6, FCA will also be calling on Parties to extend the mandate of a working group that has been examining how to ensure that adequate resources are available to implement the FCTC at the national level. The working group has found that technical and financial resources are lacking for governments that want to implement tobacco control, international assistance is difficult to access and coordination among government's own departments is often missing.



Other FCA priorities on the COP6 agenda are:

- Strengthening ways to prevent tobacco industry interference in how governments fight the tobacco epidemic. The industry continues to threaten governments and launch challenges in national courts. Recently it has also undertaken often lengthy and costly actions in the international arena, such as in the case of Uruguay, whose life-saving public health measures have been challenged by Philip Morris through a bilateral investment agreement.
- Improving how FCTC Parties report on their FCTC obligations, to make that reporting meaningful and to help Parties to achieve compliance with the treaty.