

Press Release

Final agreement on fighting illicit tobacco must include support for low-income countries, protect against industry interference

GENEVA, March 27 – Civil society is urging Parties to the global tobacco convention, which are preparing to conclude an agreement on fighting illicit trade of tobacco products, to ensure that the deal includes measures to support low-income countries.

The fifth round of talks of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Body on a Protocol on the Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products (INB5) opens on March 29 in Geneva. It is expected to produce an agreement that will be adopted at the Conference of the Parties to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) in November.

“The illicit trade protocol (ITP) will only be effective if it can be applied in developing as well as developed countries, as it is a myth that the illicit tobacco trade operates only in countries where prices are high,” said Laurent Huber, Director of the Framework Convention Alliance (FCA). The Alliance includes over 350 non-governmental organisations in more than 100 countries.

“Parties negotiating the future protocol next week must also ensure that it is protected from tobacco industry interference, a principle that is a cornerstone of the FCTC,” added Huber.

The tobacco industry, which in the past has been complicit in the illicit trade of tobacco products, has recently worked relentlessly to insert itself into the fight against the illicit tobacco trade, by signing deals with governments to train their Customs officials, for example. Governments must be watchful of such agreements, as they open the door for the tobacco industry to interfere with public health policy.

Indeed, WHO has made tobacco industry interference the theme of World No Tobacco Day 2012, marked on 31 May.

Illicit trade in cigarettes costs governments \$40.5 billion in lost revenue yearly, with losses falling disproportionately on low and middle-income countries. It also undermines attempts to reduce tobacco consumption by raising prices – proven to be the most effective measure to curb tobacco use – and fuels organised crime and terrorism.

Since coming into force in 2005, the FCTC has become one of the most ratified international conventions. It now has 174 Parties, representing 87.4 percent of the world’s population.

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