

# Syria National Report on the Implementation of the FCTC

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## **Introduction:**

Syria spreads over a total geographic area of 185.18 km<sup>2</sup>. The cultivable land is approximately 80.000 km<sup>2</sup> while the remainder is comprised of deserts and mountainous terrain. The climate is predominantly hot and mostly dry at summer and mild, wet at winter. Administratively, Syria is divided into 14 governorates; each is normally divided into districts<sup>1</sup>.

Syria is a medium-sized economy with a population in 2008 of 19,644,000 of whom more than 53, 5 % live in urban areas. Over 40 % of all Syrians are less than 15 years old. Life expectancy has steadily increased over the last few years to 69 years for men and 74 years for women<sup>2</sup>. According to WHO healthy life expectancy at birth in Syria is 60 years for males and 63 years for females. Adult mortality rate (per 1000, 15-59 years) is 150, and under- 5 mortality rate (per 1000 live births) is 16<sup>3</sup>.

Syria has witnessed rapid changes in lifestyle, and is showing a double disease burden whereby non-communicable diseases have already emerged while infectious diseases continue unabated<sup>4</sup>. Cardiovascular disease is the second main cause of morbidity and the first main cause of death responsible for about 50% of mortality causes, whereby 49% of CVD deaths occurred before the age of 65 year<sup>5</sup>

In Syria, smoking prevalence is extremely high. It is 56.9% for men and 22% for women for cigarette, while the prevalence of waterpipe smoking is increasing dramatically to be 20.2% for men and 4.8% for women<sup>6</sup>. Cigarette smokers in Syria consume 20 or more cigarettes per day in average and have low success quit rate on their own. Compared with developed countries' smokers, Syrians smokers try more to quit and success less. This is might be attributes to the fact that smokers in Syria try to quit without any assistance, which is ineffective cessation strategy compared to the assisted interventions<sup>6</sup>

Syrian Ministry of Health has a national program for tobacco control since 1990. The main objective of this program is raise awareness on tobacco issues. Unfortunately there are limited smoking cessation programs in Syria in spite of the huge need for such interventions, especially when we get in our consideration the ascending health and economic burden of tobacco consuming in this country.

Tobacco industry is a state monopoly and controlled by the General Organization of Tobacco (GOT) that affiliated directly to Ministry of Economics.

“General Organization of Tobacco is considered one of the organizations of economic character related to Ministry of Economy and Foreign Trade and has been found on /1935/ then under decree No. /2640/ of the year /1975/ Took place of tobacco and tobacco Monopoly with all its rights and duties.

The organization specific task is to supervise tobacco planting and attend its manufacturing and trading as well as is aimed to develop tobacco economics in the field of planting , manufacturing and marketing , so as to be in line with the benefit of the farmer and customer , for the purpose of achieving the largest possible economic efficiency”<sup>7</sup> .

In 2008 GOT produced more than 12654 tons of manufactured tobacco<sup>8</sup> (as cigarette’s packs and waterpipe tobacco) mostly for local consumption and partially for exportation

## **FCTC Implementation in Syria**

Syria signed the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) on July 11, 2003 and ratified it on November 22, 2004. These dates put Syria as the fourth country in the region and the thirty third globally that did this achievement. History of tobacco legislations in Syria

### **On 1983:**

- Package health warning
  - On the side of all packs this warning should be written “ *Smoking is harmful to your health, we advice you stop it* ”

### **On 1996**

- Presidential decree no.13
  - Banning advertisement
    - in certain media
    - To certain audiences
    - In certain locations
  - Banning smoking
    - In government building

- In educational facilities
- On buses, trains, ferries, and in taxis
- Banning sales
  - to minors
  - In certain places (streets)

*Comment:*

- **Direct** tobacco advertisement is strongly **banned**; no bill board or printed media adv. , no posters
- Banning smoking in public places, governmental building and restaurants **is rarely enforced**
- The only place where the law was implemented seriously was the public transportations (train, buses, but not taxis). The fine was \$ 10 US. Syrian airlines also banned smoking on its local and international flights.

**On 2002**

- Ministerial decrees
  - Banning smoking in workplaces, schools, official meetings, cinemas and theaters

**On 2004**

- Presidential decree no 59
  - Syria ratifies Framework Convention on Tobacco Control ( 22nd November)

**On 2006**

- Law made buses, railway stations, movie theaters, parks and cultural centers smoke-free, with violators facing a fine of about **\$10** and **three months in jail.**
- Under-18s are not allowed to buy tobacco.

*Comments:*

The bans were often flouted and not strictly enforced

**On 2009**

- **Syria's president has issued a decree (No. 62) banning smoking inside cafes, restaurants and other public spaces.**
- The restrictions include the nargile, or waterpipe
- This law went into effect in April 2010.

*Comments:*

This law is the first comprehensive law regarding tobacco control in Syria (see annex ) and being the Syria commitment to the FCTC.

The ban targets most public places such as restaurants, cafes, schools, universities, hospitals, parks, movie theaters, museums and public transport. Smoking waterpipes is also prohibited in public under the new law except in well-ventilated and designated areas. The law also forbids the sale of cigarettes to minors. Offenders will face fines ranging between \$45 and \$870 and a possible three to 12 months in jail.

**Article 8: Protection from exposure to tobacco smoke**

According to the new law (Presidential Decree no 62), Article II; a total ban should be in:

- All educational institutions
  - All health facilities, forests and nature reserves, houses of worship, sport clubs and halls, cultural center, and all means of transportation
  - Places producing, selling, transporting, or distributing fuel and gas
  - Elevators
  - During official meetings, conferences, lectures
  - Any other place identified by the Prime Minister.
- Well-ventilated space reserved for smokers only in:
    - Prisons and jails,
    - Airports, seaports, train stations, way stations for passengers, and
    - Governmental buildings (article II, c)
    -

- Hotel owners who wish to permit smoking can reserve *thirty percent* of the total number of rooms for smokers (article V, b)
- The decree imposes a fine of at least 2,000 Syrian pounds (**\$46**) on those who break the ban, while it goes up to a staggering **\$900** in five-star hotels

*Comments:*

This law doesn't fit the FCTC Art.8 requirements as "*that approaches other than 100% smoke-free environments have been proven to be ineffective*". Besides, allowing smoking in hotel rooms does not meet the Article 8 Guidelines

## **Evaluation**

To monitor and evaluate the implementation of this law, Syrian Center for tobacco Studies (SCTS) has launched a survey to measure the tobacco smoke-derived particulate levels in public places before and after banning smoking law. The TSI Sidepak AM510 Personal Aerosol Monitor was used to measure the concentration of particulate matter less than 2.5 microns in diameter (PM2.5) in 40 bars, restaurants, retail outlets, and other workplaces. The data were collected and the analysis is on a process. This first phase of the survey was done between January 2010 and February 2010 (before enforcing the law in April 2010)

A second phase of data collection will be done on January and February 2011 in almost the same venues to compare the two sets of figures which can be a good indicator on the seriousness of enforcing the law.

### **Article 11: Packaging and labeling of tobacco products**

Article VI, b, 1, of the new Syria law mentioned that "The following warning label should be included, in clear Arabic letters, *Smoking harms your health and is a chief cause in the incidence of cancer as well as heart, vascular, and respiratory disease; it is harmful during pregnancy and to the fetus.*"

*Comments:*

- The new Syria law doesn't fit the FCTC art.11 and its guidelines as there is no requirement for the health warning in terms of size, full-colored pictorial, and rotating.

### *Observation:*

We collected different Syrian manufactured cigarettes packs (some brands like Gitan is under licensed) to assess the health warning. We noticed the following:

- Some packs have the old health warning, i.e. nothing on the front and back display area, but on the side
- Other packs have the new health warning; written in both English and Arabic, with a frame, and 30% of the principal display.
- In some brands, packs have health warning on the one principal display, two language, no frame, and less than 25%.n (see photos)

### **Article 13: Tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship**

#### Method:

A survey was conducted in Syria between 15-8-2010 and 16-10-2010 by a two-researched team from the Syria Center for Tobacco Studies (SCTS), in order to verify compliance with the national recently -issued smoking law

#### Settings:

Three different cities were selected for the purpose of this survey; Damascus, the capital, with 3.5 million in terms of population, located in the southern of the country, Aleppo, a medium-sized city of 2.1 million, located in northern region of Syria, and a small town, Izaz with 53000 inhabitants sited to the far north-west of Syria and very close to the southern Turkish border.

#### Process:

Prominent sites – mainly the major road intersections- were chosen in the selected cities where the SCTS team begins its walk tour. After selecting the points, team determines to take –first- the down direction, then to the right until back to the start point. In Damascus and Aleppo the team covered the most density area in the down town where in the town the team chose the weekly-shopping center.

The observations to be included in the walk were:

- Street vendor or kiosk
- Convenience store
- Grocery store or supermarket

- Liquor store
- Tobacco store

36 points were included in this survey; 5 kiosks, 6 vendors, 2 tobacco and liquor stores, 4 convenience stores, 5 supermarkets, 9 groceries, and 5 tobacco stores . All observations were documented on paper note and photos were taken –when possible- by Sony digital camera. Time, date, and the type of violation were also documented. (Annex 1).

### Findings:

#### 1- Outdoor and point of sale Advertising:

a- No direct outdoor tobacco advertisement was noticed, like billboards and posters.

b- Some poster-like advertisements were seen indoors in different shops representing some cigarette brands. Posters were displayed in some places such as the front window of a kiosk, or on the tobacco shelf in points of sale. Statements like “*blue strikes= Lucky strike*”, “*An irresistible charm= Gauloise*”, and “*The paper pack is more fascinating = Lucky strike*”, were written on these posters. This observations violate the Presidential decree No. 62/ 2009 that mentioned in Article IV: “*Advertising or sponsorship of tobacco products and related paraphernalia intended for the use of tobacco products is forbidden in any video, written, or audio media, or in any other form of media*”.

c- All points of sale (kiosks, convenience stores, liquor, groceries, newspapers vendors, and supermarkets, display cigarettes packs openly.

d- Lighters, cigarette pockets, and ashtrays of the same the color and shape of a well- known cigarette brand were also seen in different points of sale. Those are offered sometimes as promotion with the packs or being sold separately.

All that mentioned in points (c and d) is a plain violation of the article (13/4/a) of the FCTC. The Syria smoking law doesn't mention clearly to this matter.

e- By monitoring the national TV and the neighbor countries' TV channels we found that there are no restrictions on showing the main actors (or actresses) in the TV series smoke. Smoking cigarettes is presented as a normal behavior to the positive characters especially if the character represents an intellectual. Smoking

waterpipes also is a new fashion in the TV drama, representing young women (or university students) smoke in joyful manner.

## **2- Print media:**

a- It was noted that there was no tobacco advertising in the local print media (specifically the daily/ or weekly newspapers).

b- In some youth -oriented weekly magazine commonly read in the country, we noticed tobacco advertisements either in a direct way or as marketing article on some tobacco products. Mostly, these magazines come from the neighbor countries.

c- In the classified pages it was noticed that they advertise for waterpipe openly. Some restaurants adv. display offers like *“we guarantee we have the best and the most delicious waterpipe”* or *“we offer discount on waterpipe smoking”* or *“Get one, take one free”* *“free of charge waterpipe when purchasing a meal”*

d- We collected some flyers distributed on houses advertising for smoking waterpipe. Some restaurants or cafes offer vouchers in this respect, like.

## **Article 16: Sales to and by minors**

1- Selling tobacco to or by those who are under18 was seen everywhere, in spite of banning it by the Syrian Presidential decree No.62/ 2009 Article 3,c which says: *“It is prohibited to sell tobacco products to those appearing to be less than eighteen years of age, or to provide or sell said products to them. The seller of tobacco products must place a “No Smoking” sign in a prominent place within the store”*.

*Note: We could not take photos for minors buying cigarette but we managed to take for sellers.*

b- A warning of prohibiting selling for those minors was seen in very few stores, and some of them required the identity card.

c- Cigarette vending machines are accessible to minors without censorship or control.

d- Some points of sale sell cigarette by stick to those who are under 18 (minors). This is a clear violation to the Syria law that says: *“It is prohibited to sell the contents of tobacco product labels by stick.*

## **Media release:**

Starting from January 2010 (prior to the date of enforcing the new tobacco law (issued on Nov.2009, and put into work on April 2010), we used different techniques to raise awareness on the law, and press on government to implement it in a proper way:

### *Press release and websites*

Many articles were written by the SCTS coordinator in the local newspapers on the FCTC, the new law, and the importance of adapting and implementing this law.

Send press release to the Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA), which in turn, sent it to many newspapers and websites (see annex).

### *TV interviews:*

Two interviews were organized in the local and national TV to discuss the new tobacco law and the benefits of implementing this law in Syria context.

First interview: February 8th 2010:

Dr. Fouad Fouad

The interview lasted 45 minutes and the main topic was to talk about tobacco health hazards, secondhand smoking, and the importance of having policies for tobacco control. Questions were raised about waterpipe, the light cigarettes, and the Syrian law for banning smoking in public places.

Second interviews: August 17th 2010

Dr. Fouad Fouad

This interview was about the progress in implementing the laws and the difficulties that faced it during the process of putting it into work.

**Compare other articles of FCTC with the newly issued Syrian tobacco law (no. 62)**

<b>FCTC</b>		<b>Syrian Tobacco Law-no.62</b>		<b>Comments</b>
<b>Article 5.2b</b>	Adopt and implement effective legislative, and/or other measures to develop appropriate policies for preventing and reducing tobacco consumption, nicotine addiction and exposure to tobacco smoke		Issuing Presidential decree no. 62 “Comprehensive law for banning Smoking”	
<b>Article 5.3</b>	Parties shall act to protect these policies from commercial and other vested interests of the tobacco industry in accordance with national law.			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Tobacco Industry is a state monopoly</li> <li>- Some international brand names are now manufactured by the national Tobacco Establishment “under- licenses”</li> </ul>
<b>Article 6.2.a</b>	implementing tax policies and, where appropriate, price policies, on tobacco products so as to contribute to the health objectives aimed at reducing tobacco consumption			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1- Pack of 20 cigarettes in Syria costs:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Marlboro</i>: \$ 1.8</li> <li>- <i>Al Hamra (local cigarette)</i>: 65 cent</li> </ul> </li> <li>2- Waterpipe session (one head): \$ 2-5</li> <li>3- Tax: 22% of retail price</li> <li>4- Nothing in the new law mention to the tax or price policy</li> </ul>

<b>Article 6.2.b</b>	Prohibiting or restricting, as appropriate, sales to and/or importations by international travelers of tax- and duty-free tobacco products.			<p>Duty free tobacco products is tax-free</p> <p>No article in the new law restricts tobacco products sales in duty- free shops</p> <p>The awareness is not yet common about using taxation to decrease the demand for tobacco.</p> <p>No clear policy for increase taxation and prohibit tobacco sales in duty –free shops</p>
<b>Article 9</b>	Regulation of the contents of tobacco products	<b>Article. 6.a</b>	The Syrian Commission of Specifications and Standards shall be developed for all tobacco products, requirements for its production, testing methods, whether these products are local or imported	As tobacco industry is a state monopoly in Syria, more attention should be paid to the commercial or other vested interests
<b>Article 14</b>	Demand reduction measures concerning tobacco dependence and cessation	<b>Art. 7</b>	Relevant health authorities are required to encourage people to quit smoking and to provide the required counseling in this	Pursuant to FCTC Article 14(2)(a), Parties shall endeavor to “design and implement effective

			<p>matter, as well as providing those who wish to quit smoking with the required measures and prescription drugs if necessary.</p>	<p>programmes aimed at promoting the cessation of tobacco use, in such locations as educational institutions, health care facilities, workplaces and sporting environments.” Accordingly, consider specifically including such locations in Article VII</p> <p>Still no comprehensive guideline for cessation at the national level</p>

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