ARE WE DOING ENOUGH TO STOP ONE BILLION DEATHS?

Early in this century, epidemiologists forecast one billion deaths from tobacco in the course of the 21st century, including 500 million amongst people already alive. This staggering figure has been with us since - and no doubt many delegates at this session of the Conference of the Parties (COP) have used it in their own memos, press releases and reports.

But think about what that means in relation to the short time the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control Conference of the Parties meets every two years. It works out to about a quarter of a million deaths per minute spent in plenary, Committee A or Committee B this week.

While no one expects COP8, by itself, to put an immediate end to the epidemic of tobacco-caused death, we should all be aware of the heavy responsibility on our collective shoulders. This is not a week for sterile debates or lengthy diplomatic niceties. It is a week to focus on action, and the slow-motion scandal that is our collective failure to implement the FCTC with the speed and urgency it deserves.

As Geoff Fong explains in this issue, the FCTC works well when implemented - but most Parties have substantial gaps.

A key item on the COP’s agenda this week is a proposed Global Strategy to Accelerate Tobacco Control. This is our best hope to tackle the problems Parties face with implementation, from lack of financial resources- and technical knowledge to political indifference and tobacco industry interference.

A Global Strategy- if translated into an appropriate budget and workplan, into strong national plans, and into a concerted push for more resources, offers a realistic way to treat FCTC implementation with the seriousness it deserves.
IN LOVING MEMORY OF DR. SHEILA NDYANABANGI
FORMER HEAD OF DELEGATION FROM UGANDA
A RESPECTED VOICE FOR ALL AFRICA

The painful news came on August 25, 2018, a little more than a month short of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) Conference of the Parties (COP). COP observers and delegates from all over the world expressed their shock and grief as news of her death came. Public health advocates from around the world have called her death a big loss for the continent and the international tobacco control community. Dr. Sheila's African region tobacco control colleagues described her as: a colossus, progressive, persuasive, dependable, bold, articulate, tireless, and fierce when it came to fighting tobacco industry interference.

Dr. Sheila was a constant presence at the WHO FCTC COP. She was the voice of reason that would relentlessly bring people back to focus during COP debates, and the conscientious voice that would remind us of the bigger picture.

Just a few months ago in March, she was speaking like a warrior against tobacco industry interference at the plenary of the 17th World Conference on Tobacco or Health in Cape Town; “We can make the tobacco industry run, we can intimidate them, we should not fear them because we have the truth, they have deception”. For tobacco control advocates in Africa, Dr. Sheila was a mentor, a mother, and a friend.

AFRO has been known to champion the objectives of the FCTC, especially in terms of strong positions on countering tobacco industry interference, in large part because Dr. Sheila was there to provide support, as well as the strong voice, as needed for the occasion.

As some of her colleagues put it: The best way to remember her is to redouble our efforts in championing what she stood for.

Deborah Sy
Global Center for Good Governance in Tobacco Control

THE GLOBAL STRATEGY: A TIMELY TOOL FOR AFRICA

Tobacco smoking causes more deaths each year than HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria combined (WHO 2008, WHO 2015). The number of smokers in Africa is currently estimated at 77 million and the World Health Organization (WHO) expects that this figure will increase by 40 per cent by 2030. WHO projects a dramatic increase in some African countries. This calls for a concerted effort worldwide to reverse the trend.

Effective implementation of the FCTC in Africa has been impeded by a number factors, including the severe lack of resources. Most countries in Africa, a continent which has the youngest population globally, are supportive of the adoption of the Global Strategy during this COP. The Global Strategy provides a framework that will keep discussions at the COP focused on priority issues agreed by Parties, enhance and streamline international cooperation on tobacco control, raise the international visibility of the FCTC, as well as outline the mechanisms to raise funds at the domestic and global level to support the implementation of the Convention.

In particular, we support the implementation review mechanism (IRM), which is part of the Global Strategy, will identify barriers to progress and provide a focus for follow-up assistance. This will involve a peer review of Parties’ implementation reports to identify and to share good practices that will help improve domestic policies, laws and enforcement.

As Civil Society Organisations working in tobacco control, we call upon the Parties to adopt the Strategy as is, and recommend that a plan of action be put in place for its implementation.

By investing in comprehensive tobacco control policies and strategies, the ‘youthful’ continent can ensure that they are spared from a harmful product that reduces workers’ productivity and which cuts lives short due to chronic illness and premature mortality.

Vincent Kimosop
Tax Justice Network - Africa
&
Leonce Sessou
African Tobacco Control Alliance (ATCA)
YOUR GUIDE TO TRANSPARENCY DISCUSSIONS ON DAY 1

The issue of transparency emerges in four separate places in the COP8 agenda. To help minimize confusion, here is an overview of the decisions delegates are being asked to make, and what the FCA recommends that you do.

1) Plenaries and committee meetings - ‘public’ or ‘open’?
The Rules of Procedure state that all COP sessions should be ‘public’ unless the COP decides to make them ‘open’ (only Parties, non-Parties, intergovernmental organisations (IGO) and non-government organisations (NGO) in the room) or ‘restricted’ (only Parties and essential Secretariat staff). The practice in recent COPs has been to decide early on Day 1 that the plenaries be declared ‘open’ (thus requesting media and members of the public to leave the plenary). The reason for this is that public badges and media have, unfortunately, been avenues for tobacco industry infiltration. This time round a decision will once again have to be made on whether the plenaries and committee meetings are ‘public’ or ‘open’.

FCA recommends: that given that there is no process for members of the public or media to screen-out tobacco industry representatives, the FCA expects the practice at previous COPs to be repeated – ie. Plenaries should be designated ‘open’ rather than ‘public’. The negative consequence of this is that legitimate media and members of the public without industry-ties will also be excluded. To help address this in the future we make recommendations for agenda point 8.8 (see below)

2) 8.2 - Maximizing Transparency of delegations from Parties and Observers to COP, its subsidiary bodies and other WHO FCTC meetings

At COP7 this issue was discussed but no decision was taken. Between COP7 and 8, the Bureau consulted extensively with Parties on how to move forward on this issue. The result was clear that Parties would not support the mandatory declarations that were discussed at COP7. The COP will be asked to consider adopting a new draft decision and its annexes, which would call upon individual Party delegates to provide declarations of interest on a voluntary basis. A similar process would apply to IGO observers, and for the head of each NGO delegation.

The draft decision in FCTC/COP/8/15 also requests that, should these procedures be adopted, the FCTC Secretariat would publish a list of Parties and observer organisations from whom completed forms have been received.

FCA recommends: the adoption of the draft decision and call on Parties to complete, on a voluntary basis, Declaration of Interest forms and remember their obligations under FCTC Article 5.3.

3) 8.6 - Review of accreditation of observers to the COP

COP7 requested the Secretariat to survey IGOs with observer status to identify endorsements, actions in support of the treaty, unresolved, real or perceived conflicts of interest and direct or indirect involvement in the tobacco industry. The Secretariat reached out multiple times to all 27 IGOs to complete the survey. 8 responded. Parties will be requested to consider adopting the draft decision.

FCA recommends that: COP8 accept the decision with these modifications: mandate the Secretariat to continue their effort to survey the IGOs that did not respond. IGOs should be given until 2020 to respond and, after consulting with the Bureau, the Secretariat should report back at COP9 with recommendations as to whether these IGOs’ observer status should be maintained, suspended or discontinued.

4) 8.8 - Possible amendments to the Rules of Procedure of the Conference of the Parties

The Bureau is proposing the adoption of amendments to the Rules of Procedure, some of which touch on the issue of transparency at COP. They propose language to distinguish between members of the public and accredited media. The Secretariat also proposes to amend rule 27(2) to make meetings of subsidiary bodies ‘open’ rather than ‘public’ unless otherwise decided by the COP, and rule 32 to add that accredited media shall be entitled to attend all ‘open’ sessions unless otherwise decided - this could mean both plenary and committee meetings.

FCA recommends: a pre-screening process for members of the public (to screen out tobacco industry representatives) and the media (to ensure the tobacco industry cannot infiltrate meetings through the media) and supports the Secretariat’s proposal to amend Rules 32 and 27(2).
MORE THAN HALF OF THE WORLD’S POPULATION IS PROTECTED BY PICTORIAL HEALTH WARNINGS

There are currently 118 countries and territories that have required picture warnings on cigarette packages. This finding comes from an international report - Cigarette Package Health Warnings: International Status Report - being launched today at COP8. This new report provides an overview, ranking 206 countries/territories based on warning size, and lists those that have finalised requirements for picture warnings. Regional breakdowns are also included in the analysis as well as a global overview for plain packaging.

Copies of the report (in English and French) are available at the FCA booth. Delegates are welcome to take as many copies of the report as they would like for use in their home countries.

58 per cent of the world’s population is now covered by final requirements for picture warnings, and many more countries are on the right track. The total of 118 is an increase from the 100 countries/territories that had implemented picture warnings by the end of 2016.

In terms of size, Timor-Leste is the new world leader with warnings that cover 92.5 per cent of the package front and back on average (85 percent front, 100 percent back). Nepal and Vanuatu are tied for second with a warning size of 90 per cent, New Zealand is the 4th at 87.5 per cent (75 percent front, 100 percent back), while Hong Kong, India and Thailand are the 5th at 85 per cent.

There are now 107 countries/jurisdictions (compared to 94 in 2016) requiring warnings to cover at least 50 per cent (on average) of the package front and back, and 148 requiring a minimum size (on average) of at least 30 per cent.

Enormous progress continues to be made around the world. Well-designed package warnings are a highly cost-effective measure to increase awareness of the health effects and to reduce tobacco use. Picture-based messages are far more effective than a text-only message. Indeed, a picture says a thousand words. Pictures attract more attention, and reach individuals who are illiterate or who cannot read the national language(s). Furthermore, the effectiveness of warnings increases with size. Larger ones allow for bigger and better pictures, additional information and/or a larger font size.

The new report, currently available in English and French, was prepared by the Canadian Cancer Society, in collaboration with the FCA. The Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids is facilitating translations in Arabic, Chinese, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish.

Rob Cunningham and Jennifer Kuntz
Canadian Cancer Society
TO ACCELERATE FCTC IMPLEMENTATION, PARTIES SHOULD DISCUSS (AND ADOPT) THE GLOBAL STRATEGY EARLIER

This week, Parties have a unique opportunity to usher in a new kind of COP session and to take a concrete step towards realising a world free from the tobacco epidemic. Under agenda item 7.1, Parties will consider adopting the Global Strategy to Accelerate Tobacco Control - the first ever strategic plan for the treaty.

As outlined in FCTC/COP/8/II, the Global Strategy is a clear, outcome-oriented plan that is intended to guide the development of the COP's budgets and workplans, and to inform the work of Parties and the broader tobacco control community over the next several years. It highlights a small number of priority areas for action, which will help to achieve the greatest reduction in tobacco use prevalence. The plan also includes goals and targets, to enable the COP to assess progress and to inform future work.

Many other treaties have developed and implemented these kinds of plans and have experienced successes in doing so. Based on these other treaties' experiences, there is reason to believe that the WHO FCTC Strategy can help to enable better FCTC implementation and progress towards SDG target 3a in a number of ways, including by:

- Keeping discussions at COP and work between COP sessions focused on priority issues agreed by Parties
- Enhancing and streamlining international cooperation on tobacco control
- Raising the international visibility of the FCTC
- Helping to raise funds at the domestic and global level

Though we've made much progress on tobacco control in the past decade, there is still much work to be done. Large gaps in FCTC implementation remain within and between regions and Parties continue to report facing major challenges and obstacles to implementing the FCTC.

Endorsing this Strategy will be an important first step. At COP8, Parties will also need to discuss how to translate the Strategy into action and how to assist Parties to do the same thing at the national level. For one thing, it will be critical that COP8 aligns the budget and workplans with the Strategy.

This is an important topic with implications for other agenda items. For this reason, FCA recommends that Parties amend the COP8 agenda so that the Global Strategy is discussed as the first order of business in Committee A this week.

THE IMPACT OF FCTC ON REDUCING SMOKING: NEW EVIDENCE ON THE NEED FOR STRONGER AND ACCELERATED IMPLEMENTATION

Does the WHO FCTC actually reduce smoking, and if so by how much? The short answer is: yes, but it could be much, much more.

Between 2007 and 2014, FCTC implementation reduced global smoking by roughly 5 per cent, or 49 million smokers.

But this is far less than could have been achieved with full implementation of key measures: a further 30 per cent reduction, or 315 million smokers.

These new findings are striking, underscoring the importance of mobilizing efforts to strengthen and accelerate implementation of the FCTC—the objective of the Global Strategy to Accelerate Tobacco Control, which will be discussed at the COP this week.

These results are an extension from the work of the FCTC Impact Assessment Expert Group, which was created at COP6 in 2014. The EG conducted an extensive evaluation of the impact of the FCTC over its first decade.

As part of the impact assessment exercise, the International Tobacco Control Policy Evaluation Project (ITC) at the University of Waterloo in Canada and colleagues at WHO, conducted analysis of the impact of the FCTC on smoking prevalence. Analysing data from 126 countries, covering over 90 percent of the world's population, we examined the relationship between key demand-reduction policies (Articles 6, 8, 11, 13, 14) implemented at the highest level (at the level of the guidelines) by countries within the first decade of the treaty and the change in smoking prevalence among adults aged 15+.

The results, published last year in the Lancet Public Health, found that countries that implemented a greater number of these key FCTC articles also experienced a greater decrease in smoking rates. Specifically, on average, for each additional policy implemented, a country experienced an average a decrease in smoking prevalence of 1.57 percentage points (a relative decrease of 7 percent).

However, the problem is that very few Parties have actually implemented these policies. Fifty-five countries have implemented none of the five policies; 45 countries have implemented only one; and 20 countries have implemented only two. Overall, the average number of policies implemented by a Party in the first decade of the treaty was just 1.04 out of the five.

The conclusion and implication is clear: The FCTC works if implemented. But because the rate of implementation has been so poor, there has been a tremendous missed opportunity— which is still growing every day— to make substantial advances in global health through stronger and accelerated FCTC implementation.

Geoffrey T. Fong, Shannon Gravely, and Lorraine Craig
International Tobacco Control Policy Evaluation Project, University of Waterloo
The idea for businesses to be involved in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is trending and many consumer goods companies have started to engage with the SDG framework. Tobacco corporations belong to the early adapters of SDG rhetoric even though the regulation of the tobacco industry is part of the 2030 agenda (SDG 3.9). Their products kill seven million people each year. Cutting global tobacco prevalence would significantly contribute to reducing premature mortality caused by NCDs, as stipulated in SDG 3.4.

Tobacco control is relevant for the achievement of sustainable development far beyond public health. It can help to eradicate poverty and hunger, reduce workplace-related injuries and diseases (second-hand smoke at work is responsible for 433,000 deaths each year, globally), contribute to education, protect the environment and provide billions of dollars to fund development through tobacco taxes.

Ironically all four multinational tobacco companies claim to support the SDGs. Imperial Brands announced in its 2017 Annual Report a review of the company’s Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs in view of the SDGs. British American Tobacco’s Chief Executive Officer Nicandro Durante sees “a clear alignment between the SDGs and our own sustainability priorities”. The Swiss headquartered Japan Tobacco International used the SDGs to attack the WHO. In the glossy part of its most recent annual report, Philip Morris International lists all SDGs it claims to contribute to, including health, without mentioning that the tobacco control treaty is part of the goals. A treaty that the corporation fights with whatever means available.

For decades, the tobacco industry has undermined the tobacco control efforts of the WHO and governments worldwide, using manipulated science, overt and subvert lobbying, front groups, CSR projects, as well as threats and legal action in national courts and investor-state dispute settlement tribunals. Why would they engage in the SDGs instead of ignoring them altogether?

SDG 3 explicitly identifies the WHO FCTC as an important development far beyond public health. While the four multinationals have started to admit to the “health concerns associated with smoking”, usually in tandem with praise for e-cigarettes or heated tobacco products (which have not been proven to be nonhazardous), they continue to fail to take responsibility for the millions of deaths in the past, present and future. Not only they continue to sell combusted tobacco products, on which they spend the lion’s share of their promotional budgets, but are also expanding their markets geographically and scaling up their promotion.

The only way the tobacco industry can truly contribute to the achievement of the SDGs is the immediate cessation of all marketing efforts for cigarettes and other harmful tobacco products, and to stop the manufacture and sale of these products. Yet they continue with their old strategies to deceive, block and delay tobacco control. This has nothing to do with sustainable development, except for the sustainable development of corporate profits.


Laura Graen
Unfairtobacco

SPOT THE FILIBUSTER – A GUIDE FOR DELEGATES AND OBSERVERS

Filibuster is a noun that refers to a tactic used by a representative of tobacco interests to delay, obstruct, block, retard, forestall, restrain, hinder, protract the decisions that need to be made at COP8.

Anne Jones
The Union and member of FCA
As countries around the world continue to implement the life-saving measures called for by the WHO FCTC, tobacco companies have found a new, secret way to market their products to young people: social media.

A two-year investigation by the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids in more than forty countries recently revealed how the world’s four largest publicly-traded tobacco companies are secretly advertising cigarettes on social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Tobacco companies are engaging in the same marketing tactics they used for decades to reach kids and young people—only now deploying their strategies on social media to reach an even wider, unlimited audience of all ages to promote their brands and re-normalise tobacco use.

The investigation disclosed that Philip Morris International, British American Tobacco, Japan Tobacco International and Imperial Brands are paying or incentivising young people who have a significant online following to share images of cigarettes or smoking with billions of social media users around the world. Extensive evidence collected online and anonymous interviews with social media influencers in 10 countries revealed that paid influencers were explicitly instructed to promote particular brands of cigarettes on social media, when to post content for the maximum exposure and how to take “natural photos” that do not look like staged advertisements for cigarettes.

As a paid influencer for British American Tobacco explained: “I’m working for Lucky Strike, for their cigarettes […] We have to publish 2 photos a week with the product, made in a subliminal way, as if right now I put the pack of cigarettes here on the table and I take a photo. Because it’s obviously illegal. So they have this group of people in every city […] They try to create this thing where they give packets of cigarettes to people with a certain number of followers, so that they post a picture with the packet. The final image they want to give is that smoking Lucky Strike is cool. Then there are the hashtags that we use for the pack - for the product - and the hashtag for the events, situations, places…#Lus for the pack of cigarettes, #Like_Us Party for the events…We are called Ambassadors.”

In one country, influencers were instructed to cover up the required health warnings on packs in their social media posts.

All of the campaigns documented have been viewed more than 25 billion times around the world on Twitter alone.

These social media campaigns for Big Tobacco have been documented in countries that ban tobacco advertising on the internet. In Brazil, public health leaders filed a legal complaint against British American Tobacco last month for the companies’ unlawful social media marketing campaigns promoting Kent, Lucky Strike and Dunhill cigarettes. In addition to violating national laws aimed to curb the reach of tobacco marketing, the tobacco companies’ campaigns undermine the policies of social media companies like Facebook and Instagram that do not allow paid advertising for tobacco products on their platforms.

And now, following news coverage of this tactic in media outlets like the New York Times, tobacco companies are trying to cover their tracks after being caught red-handed. Companies like British American Tobacco are altering social media content by deleting hashtags known to be associated with their online campaigns for cigarettes, making it harder to track this deadly advertising tactic.

Given the unprecedented scope of these marketing campaigns and the fact that public health authorities agree that exposure to tobacco product marketing causes youth to start and keep using tobacco, Parties are encouraged to consider Framework Convention Alliance’s (FCA) recommendations to: 1) Consider implementing the knowledge hub for cross-border tobacco advertising and promotion that would operate as a formal notification system so Parties can identify and share these global marketing campaigns; and 2) Require the Secretariat to commission a monitoring guide from marketing and analytics experts to detail the technical means necessary to identify this covert and harmful form of tobacco marketing.

For more details, see: https://www.takeapart.org/wheretheresmoke/

Figure 1. Instagram post from Brazil promoting #AheadBR, a social media campaign designed to advertise Kent brand cigarettes. Kent cigarettes are sold by Souza Cruz, a subsidiary of British American Tobacco in Brazil. In a three-month period (August-October 2017), just 485 social media posts using the hashtag #aheadBR reached more than 5.3 million people. The posts were viewed more than 9 million times on social media.

Caroline Renzulli and Monique Muggli
Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids
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KEYNOTE PRESENTATIONS
Where There’s Smoke: How Big Tobacco is Taking Over Social Media
Highlights: Global Strategy for Tobacco Control

Refreshments and hors d’oeuvres provided

The Framework Convention Alliance (FCA) is a global alliance of NGOs working to achieve the strongest possible Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. Views expressed in the Alliance Bulletin are those of the writers and do not necessarily represent those of the sponsors.