FCA highlights priorities for would-have-been COP9 week

If it were not for COVID-19, governments and civil society advocates would have gathered in the Hague, Netherlands from the 9-13 November for the ninth Conference of the Parties (COP9); a week of negotiations to further the implementation of the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC).

Over the past 9 months, the COVID-19 pandemic has had widespread impacts on economies, health systems, and the well-being of many millions of people. It has served as a reminder of the critical links between health, development, the economy, and almost every other aspect of human life. It has also provided a new sense of urgency in the fight against the tobacco epidemic: available research suggests that smokers are at higher risk of becoming more seriously ill and dying from COVID-19.

While some countries have seen the value of implementing stronger controls on tobacco as part of their response to the pandemic, much work remains to be done.

On the occasion of the would-have-been week of COP9, the Framework Convention Alliance (FCA) took time to remind the world of the importance of tobacco control at this significant juncture, the value that FCTC implementation can bring to the COVID-19 response and recovery effort, and the need to prepare for FCTC COP9, which has been postponed until November 2021.
What advocates have to say about COP9 priorities

To mark the occasion of what would have been a COP9 week, FCA asked the global tobacco control community to share their COP9 priorities.

A series of twitter posts, blog posts, and videos from FCA members and other key stakeholders, including the FCTC Secretariat and the Dutch State Secretary for Health, Welfare and Sport (hosts of COP9) highlighted a number of important messages for the community at this important juncture.

- To deal with COVID-19, reduce the burden on health care systems, and foster resiliency against future infectious disease outbreaks, governments must address the underlying causes of NCDs, including risk factors like tobacco use.

- Implementing the proven tobacco control measures in the FCTC, like increasing tobacco taxes, can help to ‘build back better’, boosting sustainable and equitable recovery from COVID-19.

- COP9 can serve as an important forum for discussing how to advance FCTC implementation in the post COVID-19 era, as the world’s only dedicated intergovernmental forum on tobacco control. In particular:
  a) how to provide assistance to those Parties farthest behind in their implementation of the Global Strategy
  b) how to raise tobacco taxes and implement article 5.3 of the Convention
  c) how to mobilize sustainable funding on the scale needed to support LMICs.

Priorities for the Pacific island countries include not only increased tobacco taxes and tobacco industry interference as mentioned above, but also cessation and enforcement issues.
Solomon Islands participates in 2020 global report on tobacco industry interference

The Global Tobacco Industry Interference Index is a global survey of how public health policies are protected from the industry’s subversive efforts and how governments have pushed back against this influence. It assesses how well governments have implemented the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) Article 5.3, the protection of public health policies with respect to tobacco control from commercial and other vested interests of the tobacco industry. The 2020 Index report was recently launched on November 17 with participation from 57 countries including the Solomon Islands, the first Pacific island country to take part.

The Index which was initiated in 2014 by the South-East Asia Tobacco Control Alliance (SEATCA) as a regional index, developed into a global report with the support from Bloomberg Philanthropies’ Stopping Tobacco Organizations and Products (STOP). The main author of the global publication is the Global Centre for Good Governance in Tobacco Control (GGTC) based at the School of Global Studies in Thammasat University, Thailand.

The Index report is based on publicly available information on tobacco industry interference in the countries and their respective governments’ responses to the interference for the period of January 2018 to December 2019.

The countries are ranked according to total scores provided by civil society groups who prepared their respective country indices. A low score indicates a low over-all level of interference, which bodes well for the country.

“Solomon Islands scores 49 out of 100 on global scale and ranks 15th”

The Solomon Islands scored midway on the scale with 49 and ranked 15th (with other countries having similar scores). Some positive highlights noted in the report are that the tobacco industry does not have a seat on any committee that sets public health policy in the country; when there were efforts made by the tobacco industry to slow down the implementation of pictorial health warnings (PHW), their arguments were rejected by Tobacco Control Technical Advisory Group (TCTAG) that comprised of formidable personalities that refused to give in to industry “plots and schemes”. Moreover, the new Honorable Minister of the Ministry of Health and Medical Services (MHMS) began to cut all connections made with the industry after he was briefed on Article 5.3. On the other hand, several instances of industry interference are also documented in the report.

Thanks to FCA member Global Youth Leadership Network (GYLN) for their participation in the Solomon Islands. To see the full Global report and country summaries, see https://globaltobaccoindex.org.
Fiji launches FCTC 2030 Project

Fiji was one of nine countries selected to receive dedicated international support in the second round of the FCTC 2030 project. The Secretariat of the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) leads the FCTC 2030 project in partnership with the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other experts from civil society and academic organizations. The objective of the project is to accelerate the implementation of treaty obligations in low- and middle-income countries.

Fiji’s FCTC 2030 Project was officially launched recently in Suva. The Minister of Health and Medical Services (MHMS), Hon. Dr. Ifereimi Waqainabete, gave keynote remarks summarizing the burden tobacco places on the health of Fijians and sharing some of Fiji’s tobacco control successes to date including graphic health warnings, restriction of smoking in public places and strong enforcement of existing legislation.

Dr. Waqainabete acknowledged that “the Project through the Convention Secretariat, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and WHO, will no doubt enhance our efforts in achieving the articles in the FCTC and the Protocol (Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products) and surely align us well in the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)”.

The launch was witnessed by representatives from Fiji’s Revenue and Customs Services, Fiji Police Force, local media, MHMS staff, Convention Secretariat, WHO, Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), UNDP and the Framework Convention Alliance (FCA).

The Minister’s remarks were followed by a brief video presentation from Dr. Adriana Blanco Marquizo, Head of the Secretariat of the WHO FCTC who commented that tobacco is a human-made epidemic “driven by an industry attempting to maximize profits by increasing the number of people dependent on their products and on nicotine”. Dr. Blanco Marquizo also underscored that strengthened implementation of the FCTC “will support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals including those that call for alleviating poverty, hunger and inequalities; increasing productivity; and improving air quality, aquatic life and our ecosystem”.

See Fiji on page 5
Fiji... from page 4

Mr. Andrew Black, Coordinator, Development Assistance at the WHO FCTC Secretariat, who was participating virtually in the event reminded attendees of the harm caused to the environment by tobacco growing and tobacco litter such as cigarette filters. Mr. Black also shared evidence that 1.8% of global GDP is lost due to tobacco.

Ms. Kasanita Kalisoqo from Fiji’s Tobacco Control Enforcement Unit, shared Fiji’s one year plan for the 2030 Project focusing on four key outcome areas; 1) strengthened tobacco control enforcement advocacy, legislation/policy and capacity; 2) strengthened capacity to prevent tobacco industry interference; 3) strengthened capacity to advocate for tobacco tax and price increase to reduce affordability; and 4) upskilling of tobacco control staff and continued remote technical support. Specific actions have already been identified by representatives from customs, health, local government and police.

As a Project country, Fiji will receive intensive support to implement key measures in the WHO FCTC including a Fiji-specific investment case for tobacco control that will calculate the economic cost of tobacco use on Fijian economy, the costs of key recommended WHO FCTC interventions and the returns on those investments, in terms of both lives saved and economic costs averted.

The Governments of Australia, United Kingdom and Norway have generously provided funds for the FCTC 2030 project.

For more information on the project, see here.

Partners beyond health supporting tobacco control

A good example of tobacco control partners beyond health has come to light recently. In Fiji, the Consumer Council - an advocacy organization - has raised awareness of the provision in Fiji’s Tobacco Control Act regarding the sale of loose cigarette rolls.

In Palau and Samoa the health and environment sectors partnered on projects to reduce the harm caused to the environment by cigarette butts (see story on pages 8 - 9).
Measuring tobacco sales to youth

Three US affiliated countries (Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) and Palau) conduct annual random unannounced tobacco vendor inspections (as do the 50 U.S. states and other US territories) based on a sample of tobacco outlets accessible to youth to determine the retailer violation rate and compliance with youth access laws. These inspections have been required since 1996 by the US Department of Health and Human Services (DHSS) and are linked to Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment block grants each country receives from the US Federal government.

States are required to have laws that ban the sale of tobacco to persons under the age of 18, enforce the laws, conduct the inspections, achieve a violation rate of less than 20% and report the results to the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention.

Youth, generally in the age range of 15-17, are recruited to help with the inspections accompanied by adult drivers and supervisors that most often take place in the last quarter of the calendar year. All youth inspectors and project escorts receive training prior to the inspections. For these three countries, the number of vendors inspected is generally from 150 – 225 each.

Each jurisdiction may use the results differently, but some common activities include the provision of certificates to vendors found to be in compliance with the law, letters to vendors not in compliance reminding them of the law, the distribution of merchant education material, and publicity in the local media.

Results show that the Marshall Islands drove down their retailer violation rate from 33.1% in 2012 to 14% in 2019. Palau’s violation rate was 19.8% in 2012 and 18.4% in 2019 while in the FSM, the violation rate has increased from the 17.9% rate in 2012.

Although States and US affiliates have been required to measure compliance with sales to youth under the age of 18 years, recent legislation and guidance has made 21 years as the age of sale to be monitored by these inspections. States have 3 years to make this transition. Palau’s current legal age of sale is 21 years, while RMI and FSM both have pending legislation on this issue.

The inspections are an excellent tool to help evaluate effectiveness of youth access prevention efforts and enforcement activities. Other countries could use the methodology similarly to conduct inspections in their own communities.

USP goes smoke-free

The University of the South Pacific based in Fiji, will become a smoke-free institution in the New Year. The smoke-free university will apply to all its campuses and rented facilities where USP business is carried out.

A university report attributed one-third of cancer deaths in Fiji to smoking. See more here.
SMOKING AND COVID19

Smoking likely increases the risk for getting COVID19. Smokers are also at risk for more severe disease. Quit now to protect yourself.

1 GETTING INFECTED
Hand to mouth contact is acknowledged as one pathway to get infected with COVID19. Hand to mouth contact occurs frequently and repeatedly when smoking. Vaping and waterpipe smoking are other potential ways of spreading the virus. (1)

2 MORE RECEPTORS FOR THE VIRUS
The COVID19 virus enters human cells through a receptor in the respiratory tract called ACE-2. Smoking up-regulates the ACE-2 receptor, causing it to replicate and provide more entry points for the virus. (2) This makes smokers more susceptible to getting the infection.

3 MORE SEVERE DISEASE
In a study from China, COVID19 patients who were smokers were more likely to progress to severe disease than non-smokers. Smokers were 14 times more likely than nonsmokers to progress to pneumonia. (2)

4 MORE CO-MORBIDITIES
Smokers are more likely to have co-morbid conditions, including heart disease, hypertension, chronic lung disease, diabetes and cancer - which have been associated with more severe COVID19 disease and increased risk of death. (4)

5 HIGHER RISK OF DYING
In China, of 1,099 patients with COVID19, 12.4% who were current smokers died, required intensive care unit admission or mechanical ventilation, compared to 4.7% among those who never smoked. (5)

6 NOW IS A GOOD TIME TO QUIT.
Smokers can protect themselves from COVID19 by quitting tobacco use now. Call your health provider to begin the cessation process.

7 REFERENCES
Palau and Samoa raise awareness about harm to the environment caused by cigarette butts

The Palau National Marine Sanctuary (PNMS) recently observed their 5th Anniversary in grand style. A public event was held with interactive displays and demonstrations by several partner agencies and organizations.

One of the activities was awarding of prizes for elementary school classes that had collected cigarette butts for 2 months. The butt collection activity was organized by the Palau Pledge and Friends of the Marine Sanctuary team. Over 70 classes participated and collected 370.25 pounds (167.9 kgs) of butts.

The Coalition for a Tobacco Free Palau (CTFP) partnered with the organizers and donated t-shirts and cash prizes for top 3 winning classes with the heaviest loads collected. In support of Presidential Proclamation 20-279 "the Year of Environmental Action" with a main focus on the impacts of marine pollution, CTFP and the Ministry of Health had also selected an environmental theme for World No Tobacco Day 2020.

CTFP also awarded Palau's outgoing President Tommy E. Remengesau a special recognition for his support of the environment and for tobacco control over his two term Presidency.

A poster made by students detailing their research on the harm cigarette butts cause to marine life also underscored that the upstream solution to littered butts, is the reduction of tobacco use in the Republic.

See Palau and Samoa on page 9

CTFP awards prizes to classes that collected the most butts and to President Remengesau for his support of the environment and tobacco control

370.25 pounds (167.9 kgs) of cigarette butts collected in 2 months by youth in over 70 school classes
Palau and Samoa... from page 8

In Samoa, with support from the Civil Society Support Program (CSSP), the Samoa Cancer Society (SCS) continues to implement a #buttitout campaign despite the COVID-19 State of Emergency restrictions.

The #buttitout campaign is one element of an overall CSSP funded project with the goal to raise awareness and disseminate information about the negative impact cigarette butt litter has on our health and the environment.

Since June, the SCS has completed outreach to 9 communities that include secondary schools, workplaces, church gatherings and women’s committees in rural villages where they share information not only on butt litter, but also highlight that the consumption of tobacco and alcohol has been identified as among the leading causes of cancer in Samoa.

SCS has produced 9 cigarette butt receptacles under this project with 4 already strategically installed in the town area. The engagement of local businesses and especially the government in the installation process is symbolic of the support from the community for such an initiative.

SCS is drafting awareness ads to ensure maximum exposure of the community to health and environment messages heading into the Christmas and New Year holiday season. Schools will also be encouraged to produce science projects in early 2021 to further promote awareness of tobacco use and cancer.

At the same time, SCS is building the skills of ‘Volunteer Cancer Champions’ representing village districts through training programs and mentorship so that they can help to be community educators.

While there has yet to be a permanent solution to disposal of cigarette butts in Samoa (or indeed the Pacific island countries), the SCS has support from Samoa Recycling & Waste Management to set up a container at the dump site to house all the cigarette butts in the interim.

Cigarette butt receptacles installed in various locations in Samoa

Branding on the 1st cigarette butt receptacles in Samoa
Working across sectors in the Western Pacific to address NCDs through law

A new report from the McCabe Centre for Law & Cancer shows how countries in the Western Pacific are bringing together diverse stakeholders to use law and legal frameworks to address the world’s number one killer: non-communicable diseases (NCDs). *Multisectoral coordination to address NCDs through law: Good practices from the Western Pacific Region* draws on case studies from the region, pulling out lessons for how multisectoral coordination can help develop, implement, enforce and defend legislation to prevent and control NCDs. See here for the full report.

Following the release of its new report, the McCabe Centre for Law & Cancer is hosting a webinar about the role of multisectoral coordination in legal measures to prevent and control NCDs.

Presenters from the McCabe Centre, the World Health Organization and others will discuss the findings of the report, case studies from the Western Pacific region, and other insights on how multisectoral coordination can be harnessed to address cancer and other NCDs.

**Date:** Thursday 26 November  
**Time:** 13.00 – 14.00 AEDT (convert to your time)  
**Where:** Online via Microsoft Teams  

For more information, visit [mccabecentre.org](http://mccabecentre.org) or contact [info@mccabecentre.org](mailto:info@mccabecentre.org)
Pinktober; cancer awareness in the Pacific islands

In many countries around the world October is known as Breast Cancer Awareness month. The color pink is a symbol of breast cancer awareness and brings emphasis to the cause across countries, cultures and languages. The month is often called Pinktober to highlight this special observance. This year’s theme was “together we can make a difference”.

Among some regional observers was the Samoa Cancer Society, Fiji Cancer Society, Papua New Guinea Cancer Foundation, Tonga Breast Cancer Society and Marshall Islands Ministry of Health and partners. Pinktober also offers an opportunity for organizations to provide education and raise awareness of tobacco use as not only a risk for breast cancer, but for most cancers.

Authors of *Smoking and risk of breast cancer in the Generations Study cohort* (see Breast Cancer Research) concluded that smoking was associated with a modest but significant increased risk of breast cancer, particularly among women who started smoking at adolescent or perimenarcheal ages. The relative risk of breast cancer associated with smoking was greater for women with a family history of the disease. Moreover, a report, from the California Environmental Protection Agency Air Resources Board based on 1,000 articles on second hand smoke draws a strong association between secondhand smoke and breast cancer.
FCA PACIFIC ISLAND COUNTRIES

Working together to free the world from the devastating health, social, economic and environmental consequences of tobacco and tobacco use.

The Framework Convention Alliance (FCA) represents the voice of civil society in support of the world’s first global public health treaty – the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC). The FCA is made up of nearly 300 organizations from more than 100 low, middle and high income countries.

FCA has representatives in all WHO regions. The Western Pacific - Pacific Island Countries Regional Office (WPRO-Oceania) of FCA is located in Palau.

The Office’s main activities are:
- Mobilise and support civil society capacity in support of the FCTC
- Collaborate with other technical assistance providers serving the Pacific Islands
- Provide technical assistance to members & Parties

For further information, please contact the Regional Coordinator: lymana@fctc.org.

For membership information, write to membership@fctc.org.

SAVE THE DATE

26 November 2020, webinar: Multisectoral coordination to address NCDs through law: Good practices from the Western Pacific Region See details on page 10

4 February, 2021 World Cancer Day; Theme: I Am and I Will See www.worldcancerday.org

6-7 May, 2021, WCTOH is hosting a virtual event: the Leadership Summit on Tobacco Control. See: https://wctoh.org/leadership-summit/

9-14 November, 2021: Ninth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP9), the Hague, Netherlands

16-18 November, 2021: Second session of the Meeting of the Parties (MOP2), the Hague, Netherlands

8-10 March, 2022: World Conference on Tobacco or Health (WCTOH). “Navigating change; leading with impact,” Dublin, Ireland. See https://wctoh.org/about-wctoh/

FCA MEMBERS IN PACIFIC ISLAND COUNTRIES

- Coalition for a Tobacco Free Palau (CTFP)
- Fiji Cancer Society
- Global Youth Leadership Nexus (GYLN) (Solomon Islands)
- Kumit Bobrae Coalition Inc. (Marshall Islands)
- Marshall Islands Epidemiology and Prevention Initiatives, Inc. (MIEPI)
- Kia-Henry Nema (Papua New Guinea)
- Nauru National Women’s Council
- Samoa Cancer Society (SCS)
- Tuvalu Association of NGOs (TANGO)
- Ulkerreuil a Klengar– UAK (Palau)

The WHO FCTC Secretariat’s Knowledge Hub for Article 5.3 at the Global Center for Good Governance in Tobacco Control presents a new online course in its e-learning platform LEARN. Implementing Article 5.3 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control: from policy to practice. The course is free.

REGISTER HERE: www.untobaccocontrol.org/elearning/article53/