

WHO FCTC opens 8th COP session to review progress, strengthen global fight against tobacco use

1 October 2018

News

Release

The [Conference of Parties to the WHO Framework Convention for Tobacco Control](#) (FCTC) today opens its eighth session (COP 8), with a view to defining a roadmap for strengthening and expanding the scope of the landmark global health treaty.

The COP8 discussions from 1 to 6 October bring together delegations from 137 countries, along with representatives of United Nations agencies, other intergovernmental organizations and civil society. Conference participants will review the progress in reducing tobacco use and strategies for addressing the emergence of new tobacco products and tobacco industry interference in tobacco control efforts.

WHO Director-General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, who will open the conference, has hailed the tobacco control treaty as one of the greatest public health achievements of the last twenty years.

“Since it came into force 13 years ago, the FCTC remains one of the world’s most powerful tools for promoting public health,” says Dr. Tedros. “Through the implementation of this treaty, we are making great progress, and we are saving lives.”

As a result of this treaty, countries have passed comprehensive tobacco control laws, including increased taxes on tobacco, establishment of smoke-free spaces, and requirements for large graphic health warnings and plain packaging of tobacco products.

A new [Global Progress Report on Implementation of the WHO FCTC](#) to be launched at the FCTC press conference today at 13h15 CET, features results of the reports submitted by Parties to the treaty in the 2018 reporting cycle. The report highlights global achievements in tobacco control resulting from national strategies and implementation of measures to cut tobacco use, as well as ongoing challenges posed by policy gaps and the tobacco industry.

“Many governments have advanced tobacco control actions and clearly progressed on implementing the Convention,” says Dr. Vera Luiza da Costa e Silva, Head of the

WHO FCTC Secretariat. “But this is not a time to be complacent. With astronomical budgets, the tobacco industry continues its furious efforts to undermine the implementation of our treaty.”

High on the agenda of COP8 discussions will be a draft of a Medium-term Strategic Framework to outline priorities for scaling up the global tobacco control agenda and strengthening implementation of the treaty over the next five years.

This will include a push to extend tobacco control efforts to include a new focus on the negative impacts of tobacco production on the environment and on development.

“We hope this conference will be the starting point for a wider application of the FCTC as an international treaty that extends beyond tobacco control to support strategies aimed also at promoting sustainable development and protecting environmental resources,” says Dr. Costa e Silva.

Michael Møller, Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva, has emphasized the critical need to link tobacco control with sustainable development strategies. This entails targeting the 80 percent of the world’s 1.1 billion smokers who live in low- and middle-income countries.

“Smoking is a development problem because it hits the most vulnerable and strains already overstretched health systems, feeding a vicious circle of poverty and inequality,” says Mr. Møller. “Reaching the 2030 Agenda and lessening the burden of non-communicable diseases requires early, widespread action at every level.”

COP8 will feature, for the first time, a high-level session to be held today, 15:00 – 16:00 CET, for senior officials – from Ghana, India, the Netherlands, WHO, and UN Climate Change (UNFCCC) – to discuss the environmental impacts of tobacco use and production.

Findings on the environmental ramifications of the global tobacco supply chain are documented in a new report, *Cigarette Smoking: An assessment of tobacco’s global environmental footprint*, to be launched at the COP8 in a press conference on 2 October at 13:15 CET. The report is jointly produced by the FCTC Secretariat and researchers from Imperial College in London.

In her keynote speech at the open of COP8 today, Dr. Costa e Silva notes ongoing challenges from tobacco companies, who are aggressively marketing new tobacco products and using loopholes in existing legislations to bypass tobacco control regulations.

“We must keep on working to bring resources and political will together, in order to protect the treaty from the tobacco industry, which continues to be the number one barrier to public health,” says Dr. Costa e Silva.

The first legally binding international treaty to promote public health, the FCTC was negotiated under the auspices of WHO in 2003 and has since been a key legal instrument for promoting international health cooperation.

Since it came into force in 2005, the Convention has been a powerful tool in global tobacco-control efforts, resulting in national strategies and legislation that have reduced sales of tobacco products to minors and comprehensive bans on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship.

The recent entry into force on 25 September of the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade on Tobacco Products, marked another key milestone in global tobacco control efforts. To date, 46 Parties have ratified the Protocol and two-thirds of the Parties have enacted or strengthened national legislation aimed at tackling illicit trade.

The first session of the Meeting of the Parties (MOP1) to the Protocol will be held on 8-10 October, following the close of COP8.