

International Tobacco Accountability Bulletin

News, Updates and Analyses of Issues Related to International Tobacco

U.S. Delegation Seeks to Undermine WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control

The World Health Organization predicts that by 2030, 10 million people will die annually from tobacco related disease, with 70 percent of those deaths in developing countries.

WHO member countries unanimously agreed in 1999 to respond to the global epidemic by launching negotiations on a global tobacco treaty. If adopted, the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) will constitute the first treaty negotiated through the WHO. The second round of formal negotiations over the treaty are underway this week in Geneva.

The Framework Convention could make an enormous contribution to stemming the global tobacco epidemic by fostering international cooperation on issues such as smuggling and the global marketing of tobacco products.

A proposed smuggling protocol could involve a system of tracking cigarette exports, including labels indicating the intended final destination. Cigarette smuggling is at epidemic levels -- an estimated one in three internationally traded cigarettes is smuggled -- and newly emerging evidence from company documents suggests the tobacco industry is facilitating, encouraging or even directing smuggling on a massive scale. Smuggling allows tobacco companies to evade excise taxes, which in most countries make up a considerable portion of the consumer price -- and which deter smoking by keeping prices up.

A marketing protocol could impose a worldwide ban on cigarette advertising and marketing, or at least require countries to adopt prohibitions on tobacco advertising to the extent permitted under their national constitutions.

Unfortunately, U.S. tobacco control advocates report that the U.S. delegation in Geneva is working to undermine an effective treaty. The Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids and

American Lung Association report that the United States has sought to:

- 1) Eliminate a provision calling on nations to prohibit the use of dangerously deceptive terms like low tar, light and mild to market tobacco products. Tobacco companies have used such terms to convey the impression of reduced risk from their products despite knowing that is not the case.
- 2) Delete provisions that would prohibit tax-free and duty-free sales of cigarettes and call for "imposition of taxes on tobacco products so as to achieve a stable and continuous reduction in tobacco consumption."
- 3) Reconsider a provision encouraging governments to protect non-smokers by banning smoking in workplaces and public buildings.
- 4) Delete a provision supporting the licensing of tobacco retailers as an effective means to enforce youth access laws, which are already in place in many American states.
- 5) Weaken the overall obligations of nations to implement the provisions of the proposed treaty.

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