

# The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control

## A landmark treaty

The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) is a landmark in global public health. It is a legally-binding treaty that commits its Parties to develop and implement a series of evidence-based tobacco control measures.

The Convention is a legal instrument for international cooperation on tobacco control that seeks to protect present and future generations from the devastating health, social, environmental and economic consequences of tobacco use. It is WHO's most important tobacco control tool.

The WHO FCTC came into force on 27 February 2005. It is one of the most widely embraced treaties in United Nations history with over 170 countries becoming Parties to the Convention covering nearly 90% of the world's population. The Parties to the treaty include over 90% of the Member States of the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region.

## Contents of the Convention

Tobacco control-related technical measures contained in the WHO FCTC can be divided into demand and supply reduction measures. Demand reduction measures include price and tax measures and non-price measures such as:

- ▶ protection from exposure to tobacco smoke
- ▶ regulation of the contents of tobacco products
- ▶ regulation of tobacco product disclosures
- ▶ regulation of packaging and labelling of tobacco products
- ▶ education, communication, training and public awareness
- ▶ regulation of tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship
- ▶ measures concerning tobacco dependence and cessation.

Supply reduction measures outlined in the Convention include:

- ▶ tackling illicit trade in tobacco products
- ▶ banning sale to and by minors
- ▶ provision of support for economically-viable alternatives.

There are also articles of the Convention relating to protection of the environment, questions of liability and mechanisms of scientific and technical cooperation and communication of information.

## The WHO FCTC process

The Conference of the Parties (COP) is the governing body of the WHO FCTC and comprises all Parties to the Convention. It reviews implementation of the Convention. Observers, such as nongovernmental organizations, may also participate in the work of the COP. Regular sessions of the COP are held at two-year intervals.

To promote effective implementation, the COP adopts protocols, annexes and amendments to the Convention. Subsidiary bodies, established by COP, have created guidelines in relation to various Articles of the Convention on how they should be implemented. Parties also have to periodically report to the COP on their efforts to comply with the Convention. This allows monitoring and review of the Convention's implementation, as well as the sharing of experiences.

## MPOWER

In 2008, WHO introduced the MPOWER package of tobacco control measures to help countries implement the FCTC. MPOWER is an acronym that stands for six key tobacco control measures, each corresponding to at least one provision of the treaty. They are:

- ▶ Monitor tobacco use and prevention policies
- ▶ Protect people from tobacco use



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- ▶ Offer help to quit tobacco use
- ▶ Warn about the dangers of tobacco use
- ▶ Enforce bans on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship
- ▶ Raise taxes on tobacco.

## The impact of the WHO FCTC in the Region

The WHO FCTC has increased political commitment to tobacco control at regional and national levels. This has led to the strengthening of the legal framework for tobacco control in many countries with legislation being adopted or reviewed based on the Convention. As a result, tobacco control measures have been introduced in many countries including total bans on tobacco advertising, smoking bans in indoor public places and pictorial health warnings on tobacco packaging.

There has also been a strengthening of partnerships between regional and subregional organizations involved in tobacco control. Regional coordination for tobacco control has been established, such as between WHO, The League of Arab States and member countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Nongovernmental organizations are playing an important advocacy and watchdog role in the development of the WHO FCTC and its implementation in countries. The monitoring and combating of tobacco industry interference in tobacco control has also increased.

## Best practices and the way forward

In order to achieve the full implementation of the WHO FCTC in countries, there needs to be:

- ▶ a national multisectoral mechanism for WHO FCTC implementation
- ▶ a national plan of action with clear and achievable objectives that links implementation activities to a timetable and contains a built-in upgrading mechanism
- ▶ an effective system created to monitor the progress of WHO FCTC implementation, based on the reports of Parties to the COP
- ▶ collaboration between organizations, institutions and civil society to support governments in effective implementation of the WHO FCTC
- ▶ strong national legislation to strengthen WHO FCTC implementation with strict compliance and enforcement
- ▶ sustainable funding systems for tobacco control, such as earmarking tobacco product taxes for tobacco control
- ▶ monitoring of the tobacco industry through strict implementation of the guidelines for Article 5.3 of the WHO FCTC.