



WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

FIFTY-THIRD WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY
Provisional agenda item 12.10

A53/13
10 March 2000

Tobacco Free Initiative

Report by the Director-General

INTRODUCTION

1. This document, submitted in accordance with resolution WHA43.16, provides a biennial report on progress and effectiveness of tobacco control in Member States
2. Since the establishment of the Tobacco Free Initiative as a Cabinet project, heightened priority has been given to the interdependence between the regional, national and global levels of tobacco control, especially because the tobacco epidemic is becoming increasingly globalized. The current report therefore updates information on these three levels of tobacco control activities.¹
3. Progress has been made in the following areas: support to countries, the process for establishing a framework convention on tobacco control,² coordination within the United Nations system, resource mobilization and media advocacy. Specific activities during the past two years are outlined below.

COUNTRY SUPPORT AND ACTION

4. **Legislative action.** Technical support was given to Kenya and South Africa, and requests for support have been received from Sri Lanka and Uganda. An international panel of lawyers is being drawn up to offer technical support to Member States. A website containing national legislation for tobacco control is being set up,³ and a framework for assessing the effectiveness of legislation is being formulated.
5. **Litigation.** Various types of tobacco litigation are under way in at least 15 countries, including personal injury class-action litigation in Australia, health cost recovery litigation in Canada, and public interest writ petitions in India. WHO is exploring options for litigation with selected countries.
6. **Youth activities.** The Tobacco Free Initiative continued to coordinate the joint WHO/UNICEF project, "Building alliances and taking action to create a generation of tobacco-free children and youth", supported by the United Nations Foundation. The project has now entered an activating phase in nine countries. An international consultation on "Tobacco and youth: what in the world works?" was held in Singapore from 28 to 30 September 1999 with participants from over 30 countries.

¹ Further information on project activities is available on the WHO website: <http://www.who.int/toh>

² The report of the working group on the framework convention is contained in document A53/12.

³ See <http://www.who.int/toh/natcapacity/compendium.html> for a preliminary version.

7. **Surveillance.** In collaboration with the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Global Youth Tobacco Survey has been implemented in 11 countries. It will be extended to a further 36 countries in 2000.

8. **Media.** “Tobacco kills – don’t be duped”, a project on media and advocacy for policy change involving a broad network of strategic partners and sponsored by the United Nations Foundation, was launched in California, United States of America, on 5 November 1999 with CDC and the California Health Department. Pilot programmes are being carried out in 15 countries. Using the same slogan, World No-Tobacco Day 2000 (31 May) will be a key component of the project.

9. **Economics.** The World Bank report, *Curbing the epidemic: governments and the economics of tobacco control*,¹ will be translated into all WHO’s official languages and into Japanese and Portuguese by June 2000. Teams of economists, lawyers and tobacco control experts will visit selected countries to conduct press conferences and seminars and to meet ministries of finance. The World Bank is conducting economic country analysis and producing guidelines and tools to help in-country researchers. Studies are under way in six countries and more are planned.

REGIONAL PROGRESS

10. **Africa.** The Regional Office for Africa, in collaboration with the Government of Togo and the Tobacco Free Initiative, hosted an intercountry meeting on the contribution of parliamentarians to tobacco control in the Region (Lomé, 6-8 October 1999). The parliamentarians adopted a declaration outlining their strong commitment to tobacco control. They agreed to work towards harmonized legislative and fiscal strategies, and strongly supported the proposed framework convention on tobacco control.

11. **The Americas.** The Regional Office for the Americas and the Tobacco Free Initiative sponsored a meeting (Chile, August 1999) of Latin American parliamentarians, focusing on such issues as tobacco legislation, the policy process, litigation, and the framework convention. A regional workshop (Venezuela, December 1999) will help to build skills in project management and communication strategies for advocacy.

12. **South-East Asia.** WHO convened a consultative technical conference on “Global tobacco control law: towards a WHO framework convention on tobacco control” (New Delhi, 7-9 January 2000) with participants from more than 50 developing countries, primarily in Asia, Africa, Middle East, and the Pacific. Participants concluded that there is an urgent need to establish national institutions to further the framework convention process and its implementation in parallel with the gradual dismantling of other public and private institutional structures that directly or indirectly promote the tobacco industry in the developing world.

13. **Europe.** The Action Plan for a Tobacco-Free Europe has strong links to the proposed framework convention. A second meeting of the Committee for a Tobacco-Free Europe was held in October 1999, and a strategy was developed to build up momentum for the ministerial conference to be held in Poland in 2001. The conference is expected to close with a declaration in support of the proposed framework convention. Information meetings on product regulation and on cessation were held in Finland in early October 1999.

¹ Washington, D.C., The World Bank, 1999.

14. **Eastern Mediterranean.** A new regional action plan was drawn up during an intercountry meeting (Alexandria, June 1999). To move the framework convention process forward, the Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean is seeking to work with the Arab League, and exploring mechanisms to reach countries outside the League.

15. **Western Pacific.** A regional workshop for focal points was held in August 1999 with participants from 33 countries of the Western Pacific Region. A regional action plan was approved by the Regional Committee in October 1999, and a regional primer on the Tobacco Free Initiative and the proposed framework convention was prepared in November 1999. Projects at country or subregional levels are progressing, including meetings on the framework convention process for Pacific Islands and professional development workshops on topics related to tobacco control.

GLOBAL PROGRESS

16. The work of the project is based on the principles that global action benefits national policies and, conversely, that national actions build capacity that in turn facilitates participation in global tobacco control networks.

17. **Women.** More than 300 participants, including women's leaders, representatives of nongovernmental organizations and the media, health scientists and policy-makers, attended the international conference, "Making a difference to tobacco and health: avoiding the tobacco epidemic in women and youth" (Kobe, Japan, 14-18 November 1999). The Tobacco Free Initiative has been actively involved in the preparatory process for the Beijing +5 special session of the United Nations General Assembly to be held in June 2000. Issues relating to women and tobacco that emerged from the Kobe meeting were focused upon at the Preparatory Committee meeting in New York (28 February – 1 March 2000).

18. **Global agenda.** A global agenda for tobacco control research was developed in close collaboration with Research for International Tobacco Control (International Development Research Centre), the Fogarty International Center, the United States National Institutes for Health, CDC and the United States Food and Drug Administration.

19. **Focal point.** The United Nations Ad Hoc Interagency Task Force, under WHO's leadership, replaces the former United Nations system focal point for tobacco at UNCTAD. The first meeting of the Task Force (New York, 29-30 September 1999), attended by representatives of 15 organizations, identified the principal themes for future work, namely, agricultural diversification, dissemination of Task Force information to country level, economics, employment, environmental tobacco smoke, the proposed framework convention on tobacco control, regulation of tobacco products, risk-taking behaviour, trade, and tobacco use among women. The second meeting of the Task Force was held at the Food and Agriculture Organization headquarters (Rome, 7 March 2000).

20. **WHO inquiry.** On 12 October 1999, the Director-General called for a preliminary inquiry into whether the tobacco industry has exercised undue influence over United Nations system-wide tobacco control efforts. Dr Thomas Zeltner, member of the Executive Board and Director of the Swiss Federal Office of Public Health, was appointed to lead a committee of independent experts for the inquiry.

21. **Regulation.** The Government of Norway hosted the WHO international conference on "Advancing knowledge on regulating tobacco products" (Oslo, 9-11 February 2000) which was convened in response to a call in April 1999 by the Director-General for scientific evidence that could be used as the basis for regulating tobacco products. Participants agreed that product regulation should

play an increasing role in comprehensive tobacco control policies, and should apply to all forms of tobacco and nicotine products. It was also recommended that measures aimed at product regulation should be incorporated into the framework convention on tobacco control and related protocols.

22. **Policy/Strategy Advisory Committee.** The Policy/Strategy Advisory Committee of the Tobacco Free Initiative (established in January 1999) met twice in 1999 to advise on the broad direction of the project, key political issues, policy implications of recommendations on scientific matters, and other matters requested by the Director-General. Its first meeting in 2000 will take place in Geneva from 30 to 31 March, just after the second meeting of the working group on the WHO framework convention on tobacco control.

= = =