



WHO FRAMEWORK CONVENTION
ON TOBACCO CONTROL

**Conference of the Parties to the
WHO Framework Convention
on Tobacco Control**

Sixth session
Moscow, Russian Federation, 13–18 October 2014

**FCTC/COP/6/DIV/4
13 October 2014**

**Address by Dr Margaret Chan,
Director-General of WHO**

13 October 2014

Thank you, Professor Chang-jin Moon, President of COP6. Thank you also, Minister Veronika Skvortsova, my dear sister.

Honourable ministers, distinguished delegates, colleagues and friends in public health and in the UN. I see many old friends in the audience. So good to see so many of you.

Ladies and gentlemen, good morning.

First, allow me to thank the government of the Russian Federation for hosting this Sixth Session of the Conference of the Parties to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. I have to say, personally, I have witnessed the commitment of this government, led by President Putin himself and of course you, Sister Veronika, for overcoming very tough challenges to push through a very comprehensive law to control tobacco.

The law came into full force on the 1st of June this year. I want to thank you for your leadership. Many people told me years ago this will never happen in the Russian Federation. Thank you for proving them wrong.

Speculation is a very interesting hobby for many people. Some people speculated that I would not attend this meeting because I am so busy with so many other outbreaks of communicable diseases.

No. No. No. I will not cancel my attendance at this meeting because it is too important.

On the subject of communicable diseases, I do need to make a few comments.

In just the past few days, the volatile microbial world has delivered some sharp reminders of its power. Egypt confirmed a case of H5N1 avian influenza in an infant. Austria reported its first imported case of the MERS coronavirus. The US confirmed its first two Ebola cases. And Spain confirmed the first instance of Ebola transmission on its soil.

Ladies and gentlemen.

In a world replete with so many new and old threats, we turn to tobacco control. Tobacco control unquestionably is our biggest, surest, and best opportunity to save some millions of lives. I am very pleased to be with you today to see this meeting off to a very good start.

As you all know, I have never shied away from embracing WHO's position as the tobacco industry's number one enemy. I regard this as a badge of honour. It is in this spirit that WHO lends the voice of public health, and the power of peer-reviewed evidence, to countries that are facing predictable and forceful opposition from the industry.

As implementation of the Framework Convention reaches new heights, the tobacco industry fights back, harder and through every possible channel, no matter how devious those channels and practices are. Litigation brought against governments in national courts has been common, especially against the approval of large pictorial warnings on tobacco product packages.

In an especially worrisome trend, the tobacco industry is using bilateral investment treaties to try to deter governments from protecting the health of their citizens through strong tobacco control measures that are known to work. This has been the case with claims filed against Uruguay's warning labels and branding measures, and this is also true because of the robust and courageous actions taken by Australia in plain packaging.

Australia's plain packaging is also the object of a dispute at the World Trade Organization. All eyes are on this case. There are more third parties to the dispute than ever before in WTO history.

Most recently, and in a particularly brazen move, the tobacco industry brought its agenda and its voice here to the heart of tobacco control. Yesterday, the International Tax and Investment Centre, whose board of directors includes several tobacco companies, convened Parties and Observers to discuss tobacco tax and price policies without fully disclosing their vested interests.

Please, do not be fooled by them.

Their agenda, at least, is easy to see: to undermine your power, your efforts to adopt the robust, expert-driven proposed guidelines on tobacco tax and price policy. These guidelines, when used to implement the treaty's Article 6, will protect children and young people, in particular, from initiating tobacco use.

There is an exchange of views recorded in the mountains of internal industry documents that are now in the public domain. Let me share with you one such document. It records a discussion – an internal discussion – about whether the industry should consider children as part of its market. I remember very well one reply, which I would like to quote directly: “They got lips? We want them.”

So ladies and gentlemen, this is the kind of tobacco industry tactic. They just want more and more market share. They could not care less if they are killing children.

Again, don't be fooled by them.

What is the next challenge? The next challenge is that the tobacco industry is increasing its dominance over the market for electronic cigarettes. This should not come as a surprise. One company used this year's World No Tobacco Day to call on WHO, and call on all of your governments, to promote electronic cigarettes as a way of protecting some of the lives that they themselves are killing with the other products they sell.

We also heard a familiar argument. That company insists that it "can and should be a part of this debate and possible solutions."

No way. As I have said before, giving any tobacco company a place at the negotiating table is akin to appointing a committee of foxes to take care of your chickens.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We have abundant evidence from multiple sources that implementation of the Framework Convention brings both immediate and long-term improvements for health. As I said in 2011, when the UN General Assembly – your governments – issued its landmark resolution on noncommunicable diseases, let me quote: "Full implementation of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control would deal the greatest single preventive blow to all of these diseases."

As time has shown, the tobacco treaty is important for a second reason. It is a model of how multiple sectors of government, and multiple UN agencies, can work together seamlessly and in tandem, united by a most worthy shared goal. The importance of this model continues to grow as more and more of the century's biggest threats to health have multiple root causes and as the countries in this world are doing their utmost to fully implement the treaty, and the Articles in the Convention.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me wish you a most productive session here in Moscow as you move through a heavy but vitally important agenda.

= = =