The international community has very few opportunities to protect the world’s population from a cause of massive ill health and premature death. Tobacco control is unquestionably the greatest of these opportunities, and the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control seizes this opportunity.

Margaret Chan, Director-General, WHO

We have the means to curtail the tobacco epidemic

The most powerful tool at our disposal is a treaty, the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC), which effectively protects people from the many harms of tobacco.

The WHO FCTC obliges its Parties to take incremental action against tobacco consumption, marketing and exposure, among many other measures.

The key is full implementation of the WHO FCTC.

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The poor are the most harmed

Tobacco use is growing fastest in low- and middle-income countries, owing to steady population growth and tobacco industry targeting. By 2030, more than 80% of the world’s tobacco-related deaths will be in those countries.

The costs related to tobacco use are significant. Most tobacco-related deaths occur among working-age adults. Those who do not succumb immediately often face prolonged disability.

In the low-income countries, where health insurance is scarce or nonexistent, the direct healthcare costs are frequently borne entirely by families. The economic impact of early death, disability and productivity losses contribut the burden of poverty, retarding national development and further widening health inequities.

A comprehensive solution: the WHO FCTC

The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, the first international public health treaty developed under the auspices of WHO, provides a comprehensive approach to reduce the considerable health and economic burden caused by tobacco.

The WHO FCTC is a significant milestone in public health. Developed in response to the globalization of the tobacco epidemic, it is one of the most rapidly embraced treaties in the history of the United Nations. It was adopted by the World Health Assembly on 21 May 2003 and entered into force less than two years later, on 27 February 2005. More than 170 of the 193 Member States of WHO are Parties to it.

The Conference of the Parties is the treaty’s governing body, and is supported by the Convention Secretariat. The Conference regularly reviews and promotes the implementation of the treaty. The Conference held its most recent session in Uruguay in November 2010.

In the past, each country tried to control the tobacco epidemic on its own. The globalization of the epidemic rendered these efforts ineffective. Traditional public health methods for reducing tobacco use, such as individual interventions by health-care professionals, were no match for the tobacco industry’s power, transnational reach, formidable resources and active promotion of tobacco use.

A global public health problem required a global response. The WHO FCTC represents a new approach in international health cooperation, using a global legal framework to address a globalized epidemic.

The WHO FCTC contains core demand- and supply-reduction provisions of proven effectiveness.

It reaffirms the right of all people to the highest standard of health. It inhibits the tobacco industry’s ability to influence the health policies that are designed to protect people from tobacco. It calls for enhanced international cooperation to protect present and future generations from the devastating health, social, environmental and economic consequences of tobacco consumption and exposure to second-hand smoke.

The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) is a treaty to stop the tobacco epidemic. It is the first international treaty developed under the auspices of WHO, the United Nations’ specialized agency for health. The treaty, adopted by the World Health Assembly on 21 May 2003, entered into force less than two years later, on 27 February 2005, more than 170 of the 193 Member States of WHO are Parties to it. The Conference of the Parties is the treaty’s governing body, and it is supported by the Convention Secretariat. The Conference regularly reviews and promotes the implementation of the treaty. The Conference held its most recent session in Uruguay in November 2010.

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The call to action: implement the WHO FCTC

Call to governments

▪ To Parties to the WHO FCTC: Meet all your obligations under the treaty. Pass the necessary legislation, and then enforce it.
▪ For non–Parties: Prevent the health of your people by becoming a Party to the WHO FCTC.

Call to civil society and nongovernmental organizations

▪ Strongly advocate for full implementation of the WHO FCTC

Call to the public

▪ Demand that your governments fully comply with their obligations under the WHO FCTC.
▪ If your government is not yet a Party to the WHO FCTC, mobilize public support and petition your leadership to rally for its accession.

Call to WHO, the Conference of the Parties and international partners

▪ Fully support countries’ implementation of the WHO FCTC
▪ Recognize the WHO FCTC as a major instrument in the fight against the epidemic of noncommunicable diseases
▪ Support for Parties in meeting their obligations is gradually being put in place through a variety of tools and mechanisms, such as the dissemination of guidelines, provision of technical and legal assistance, and training for experts and technical cooperation.
▪ The treaty reporting system is well established, with more than 90% of the reports expected from Parties already received and analyzed.
▪ Access to Parties is routinely being updated so that new and existing Parties can be kept informed of key information. The treaty reporting system is available online at www.who.int/tobacco/reporting.

A protocol to eliminate illicit trade in tobacco products is gradually being put in place through a variety of tools and mechanisms, such as the dissemination of guidelines, provision of technical and legal assistance, and training for experts. The protocol reporting system is internationally available resources.

A popular and rapidly embraced treaty

Advancing to the next level: promoting full implementation of the WHO FCTC

The principal bodies of the treaty, the Conference of the Parties and the permanent Conference Secretariat, have been established and are fully functional.

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