

1999 Annual Report from WHO's Tobacco Free Initiative

The Tobacco Free Initiative (TFI) is a WHO cabinet project created to focus international attention, resources and action on the global tobacco pandemic that, today, kills four million people a year. By 2030, tobacco will kill 10 million people a year, more than the combined death toll from malaria and major childhood killers.

Over seventy percent of these deaths will occur in the developing world.

Tobacco kills - don't be duped

Each tobacco death is preventable. That is TFI's message and challenge.

A cigarette is the only consumer product which, when consumed as recommended by manufacturers, kills half of its regular consumers. Globalization of marketing and trade in tobacco products means that all countries need to take strong action individually and together if their populations are to become tobacco-free. WHO is leading the way with the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) - the world's first set of multilaterally negotiated rules focusing on global tobacco control. It will be ready for signature no later than 2003. This new legal instrument is expected to address issues as diverse as tobacco advertizing and promotion, agricultural diversification, regulation, smuggling, excise tax levels, treatment of tobacco dependence and smoke-free areas.

The FCTC is a process and product. The process will activate all those areas of governance that have a direct impact on public health. Science and economics will mesh with legislation and litigation. Health ministers will work with their counterparts in finance, trade, labour, agriculture and social affairs ministries to give public health the place it deserves.

The challenge comes in seeking global and national solutions in tandem for a problem that cuts across national boundaries, cultures, societies and socio-economic strata.

The FCTC's benefits to countries are many. The most significant one is that with the Convention as a pathfinder and co-ordination vehicle, national public health policies, tailored around national needs, can be advanced without the risk of being undone by transnational phenomena. The FCTC will act as a catalyst for WHO Member States to activate policy decisions necessary for robust national tobacco control.

If we do not act decisively today, a hundred years from now our grandchildren and their children will look back and seriously question how people claiming to be committed to public health and social justice allowed the tobacco epidemic to unfold unchecked.

Dr Gro Harlem Brundtland, Director General, WHO, November 14, 1999

The FCTC is no ordinary Convention. It is potentially a public health movement

Governance:

TFI has two reporting lines. By virtue of being a cabinet project, it reports directly to the Director General. Administratively, the project is housed in the Non-Communicable Disease (NC) cluster at the WHO.

A body of independent experts makes up TFI's Policy and Strategy Advisory Committee (PSAC). The PSAC sets the policy agenda for the project and reports independently to the Director General on progress.

FCTC - The Mandate:

This is the first time in its 51-year history that the Member States of WHO are negotiating a legally binding Convention by activating Article 19 of WHO's Constitution. In May 1999, the 191-member World Health Assembly (WHO's governing body) unanimously backed a resolution calling for work to begin on the Framework Convention. A record number of nations took the floor to pledge financial and political support for the Convention. The list included the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, major tobacco growers and exporters as well as several countries in the developing and developed world which face the brunt of the tobacco industry's marketing and promotion pitch. The European Union and Non Governmental Organisations made strong statements in support of the Convention and the Director-General's leadership in global tobacco control.

FCTC - The First Working Group:

With this mandate in hand, the first meeting of the Working Group on the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) was held in Geneva, 25-29 October 1999. Representatives from 114 Member States, representing 93% of the world's people, worked for a week outlining the basic parameters of the proposed Convention. They were backed by several United Nations' organizations, the European Union and several NGOs, all calling for accelerated work on the Convention. The Working Group, seen by countries as the first necessary step in the run-up to full inter-governmental negotiations after May 2000, was technical in nature and focused mainly on discussions of Elements I (Preamble, objectives, principles), Element II (Obligations), and Element III (Institutions), and a general discussion of possible related protocols. General agreement on content issues is detailed in Document A/FCTC/WG1/7. A second meeting of the Working Group will be held in March 2000 and will consider the further elaboration of the proposed draft elements including possible protocols.

I know what the Tobacco Industry is like from the inside... The tobacco industry has always had a wanton disregard for the truth; they've gotten away with it for decades in the United States and are still getting away with it in other countries. The impact of their lies is more death, disease and suffering.

Dr Jeffery Wigand at the launch of the "Tobacco Kills - Don't Be Duped" global advocacy for policy change campaign. Former Brown and Williamson executive turned whistle-blower, Dr Wigand's story is now a Hollywood film entitled "Insider".

Full ministerial negotiations on the FCTC will begin after May 2000

Country Support And Actions

Youth:

WHO/TFI continues its co-ordinating role in the joint WHO/UNICEF project sponsored by UNF. Phase I of the project, "Harnessing the Evidence for Action" has been completed (Brazil, China, India, Oman, Poland, South Africa), and the project is entering the activating phase in Barbados, China, Fiji, Gaza West Strip, Jordan, Sri Lanka, Venezuela, Ukraine, and Zimbabwe. TFI co-ordinated an International Consultation, "Tobacco and Youth: What in the World Works" (28-30 September 1999, in Singapore), bringing together investigators and programmers from Phases I & II of the UNF project and content experts from developed and developing countries to address the questions of what interventions, policies and programmes are successful in reducing tobacco use among youth.

Early results show that youth are smoking more than expected and have partial knowledge of the dangers of smoking. Most want to quit, but have access to little or no help to do so.

Women:

The International Conference, "Making a Difference to Tobacco and Health: Avoiding the Tobacco Epidemic in Women and Youth" (14-18 November, Kobe, Japan) brought together women's leaders, NGOs, and the media with health scientists and policy makers to tackle this issue. Over 150 international participants and some 150 Japanese participants issued the "Kobe Declaration" calling on the FCTC to reflect gender-specific issues. A monograph will be released shortly.

The meeting brought further clarity to two inter-related issues. One, that the women's movement is a powerful new ally in the global struggle to circumscribe the spread of tobacco and, as a corollary to that, it is vital for the FCTC to reflect gender-specific issues.

Surveillance:

In collaboration with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Global Youth Tobacco Survey (GYTS) has been implemented in Barbados, China, Costa Rica, Fiji, Jordan, Russian Federation, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Ukraine, Venezuela, and Zimbabwe, and will be expanded to another 35 countries in 2000. Planning is underway for the Global Health Professionals Tobacco Survey, which will: monitor tobacco use; assess behaviours in providing cessation support to patients; assess knowledge of health effects of tobacco. Countries selected are: Chile, Guatemala, Columbia, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Kuwait, Lebanon, Malaysia, Myanmar, Republic of Korea, and the Philippines.

Communications:

Advocacy for policy change is the cornerstone of TFI's Communications and Information work. "Tobacco Kills - Don't be Duped", a two-year United Nations Foundation sponsored project on media and NGO/advocacy for policy change, was launched in California on November 5 1999 (with CDC and the California Health Department) and is being piloted in 16 countries: South Africa, Zimbabwe, Mali, Pakistan, India, Islamic Republic of Iran, China, Ukraine, Germany, Venezuela, Brazil, Switzerland, Lebanon, Thailand, and the Philippines. Each country will bring special experiences to the FCTC process. Zimbabwe will look at agriculture diversification, Thailand will examine point of sale advertising, India will study the bidi industry, Germany and Ukraine will study the power of the tobacco industry, Mali will focus on the promotion and sponsorship tactics of the tobacco manufacturers, for example.

Dr Jeffrey Wigand, the highest ranking tobacco executive ever to come out and expose the truth about the tobacco industry - the story now immortalised in a Hollywood film the "Insider" - joined the WHO's call for exposing the tobacco industry's tactics at the launch of the campaign.

The Campaign will strengthen the ability of broadcast and newspaper journalists and other health communicators at country, regional and local levels to sift facts from fiction about tobacco use, its sales and promotion. It will make the case for health, enhance population health literacy and most importantly, influence public policy so that robust tobacco control measures and strict regulation of the tobacco industry become a reality. A broad network of inter-country strategic partners will work with the campaign.

Using the same slogan, "Tobacco Kills - Don't be Duped", World No Tobacco Day 2000 (with a focus on entertainment) will be a key component of the project. Materials for WNTD 2000 (including counter-advertising) have already been distributed to countries & Regional Offices.

The year will be used to map the placement of tobacco in films, music and sports events to strengthen calls for a global ban on tobacco advertisement and promotion.

They (the tobacco industry) are putting a lot of pressure on us through the media, sometimes attacking me personally and trying to mobilise the trade unions against us ...but our position is that everybody must comply (with the anti-smoking laws).

**Dr Nkozasana Zuma, former South African health minister (currently the country's foreign minister)
receiving the World No Tobacco Day award in May 1999**

NGO Action:

TFI recognizes that strong support and active involvement from the NGO community will be essential to secure a robust and meaningful FCTC. Following Dr Gro Harlem Brundtland's call for active involvement of the NGO community in WHO's decision-making process in general and the FCTC in particular, the International Non-Governmental Coalition Against Tobacco (INCGAT) brought together representatives from a range of NGOs world-wide to explore activity on issues of common concern. Action on Smoking and Health (ASH), London, hosted a lively meeting addressed by the UK Minister for Public Health and Dr Brundtland to enthuse British NGOs about the Framework Convention.

A particular highlight of the year was the launch of a "Death Clock" by a group of NGOs at the start of the first meeting of the Framework Convention Working Group in October. The clock counted out the number of global deaths due to tobacco-related diseases in real time - one death every 8 seconds - as the meeting went on. By the end of the week the clock had reached almost 50,000.

Plans are now being speedily advanced for the formation of a global alliance of NGOs to support the development of the Framework Convention.

Legislative Actions:

Helping countries develop legislation is a process of self-diagnosis and self-help. TFI seeks to provide countries with opportunities to learn from each other as to what laws work and what laws do not in specific settings and circumstances. To do so, an international team of legal experts from

the major legal traditions of the world is currently being selected to assist Member States develop or improve legislation. A virtual network of legal experts is also in the process of being developed in an age where electronic rather than physical presence is more important for on the spot expert advice. This year two teams were assembled for technical assistance to South Africa and Kenya. TFI is co-ordinating responses to formal requests for technical assistance to Sri Lanka and Uganda. In support of TFI's work in the area of legislation and public policy, a grant has been recently approved by the United Nations Foundation for accelerating work in building national capacity through legislation and public policy. A website compiling national legislation for tobacco control has been developed. A framework for assessing the effectiveness of legislation is being formulated.

Economics:

The World Bank Report "Curbing the Epidemic - Governments and the Economics of Tobacco Control" will be translated in all official UN languages (French, Arabic, Russian, Chinese, and Spanish) as well as Japanese and Portuguese by June 2000. Teams of economists, lawyers and tobacco control experts from WHO, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund will visit selected countries to conduct press conferences and seminars and meet Ministries of Finance and Health. The World Bank is also conducting economic analyses and developing guidelines and tools to help in-country researchers.

The World Bank's message is that economic fears which have deterred policy-makers from taking action to control tobacco are unfounded. Policies that reduce demand for tobacco, such as a decision to increase tobacco taxes, would not cause long-term job losses in the vast majority of countries. Nor would higher tobacco tax reduce tax revenues - rather, revenues would climb in the medium term. Such policy interventions could, in sum, bring unprecedented health benefits without harming economies. In other words, both the finance and health ministries would be winners.

Litigation:

In the last few years, the public health community has gained an unprecedented opportunity to study the tobacco industry through the release of millions of pages of previously secret internal tobacco company documents. These documents were obtained primarily through pre-trial proceedings in lawsuits against the tobacco industry in the United States. They show how the tobacco industry has subverted scientific enquiry and legal processes to sell a defective product that kills half of its regular users.

These documents provide substantial insight into the conduct of the tobacco industry over the past few decades. They show how and why the tobacco industry has been so successful in defeating public health objectives in the past, and provide valuable lessons into how the public health community must come to terms with the tobacco industry to make progress in the future.

There is some type of tobacco litigation underway in at least 15 countries, ranging from personal injury class action litigation in Australia to health cost recovery litigation in British Columbia, Canada to public interest writ petitions in India.

Regional Progress

Each of WHO's six regions is being supported to become a global center of expertise in a key area of tobacco control. TFI is also working closely with WHO country-representatives (WRs).

AFRO:

From 6-8 October 1999, WHO/AFRO in collaboration with TFI/HQ and the Togolese government hosted an inter-country meeting in Lomé on the contribution of Parliamentarians to tobacco control in AFRO. Parliamentarians adopted a declaration that outlined their strong commitment to tobacco control and agreed to work toward harmonized legislative and fiscal strategies in support of the FCTC. AFRO will lead the global tobacco agenda on agricultural diversification.

AMRO:

AMRO & TFI/HQ sponsored a meeting (August 1999, in Chile) of Latin American Parliamentarians, focusing on such issues as tobacco legislation, the policy process, litigation, and the FCTC. In collaboration with TFI/HQ a regional capacity-building workshop was organized in December in Venezuela, which included skill-building sessions related to two broad areas: project management & communication strategies for advocacy. With AMRO rests the global responsibility on tobacco and youth issues.

EMRO:

A new Regional Action Plan was developed during an inter-country meeting in Alexandria in June 1999. To move the FCTC process forward, EMRO is trying to work with the Arab League, and to explore mechanisms to reach countries outside the League. EMRO will develop global expertise on issues relating to religion and tobacco.

EURO:

Throughout the Action Plan for a Tobacco-Free Europe, there are strong links to the FCTC. A second meeting of the Committee for Tobacco-Free Europe was held in October, and a strategy was put in place to build up momentum for the Ministerial Conference in Poland in 2001 (along with a technical conference), which would end with a Declaration of Ministers in support of FCTC.

SEARO:

An International Conference: Global Tobacco Control Law: Towards a WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (7-9 January 2000) was held in New Delhi, India. This conference focused on issues in the FCTC process from the perspective of developing countries, bringing together for the first time developing country legal expertise on public health. The Regional Committee approved the Regional Action Plan. SEARO launched the South-East Asia Anti-Tobacco (SEAAT) torch that will be carried from four regions in a walkathon to Bangkok, which is the venue for World No Tobacco Day (May 31, 2000). SEARO will have global responsibility for all issues relating to smokeless tobacco.

WPRO:

A Regional Workshop for Focal Points took place in August with 35 participants from 33 countries of the Region and representatives from HQ, EURO & SEARO. The Regional Action Plan was approved by the Regional Committee, and a Regional primer for TFI and the FCTC was prepared in November. Plans are underway for sub-regional meetings around the FCTC, particularly for Pacific Island countries. A number of additional projects at the country-level or sub-regional level have been identified and are moving forward, including professional development workshops on tobacco control related topics, as well as a planning workshop in China in May 2000.

WPRO has global responsibility for issues relating to women and tobacco.

Regular budget funding & donor support

Regular budget:

2000-2001: The combined regular budget and casual income contribution for TFI for 2000-2001 will be US\$ 5.85 million. This includes support to Regions and covers several aspects required by the FCTC process. This represents a significant increase over 1998-1999. A target of US\$ 10 million for the regular budget is aimed at for 2002-2003.

Ongoing and future support (Governments and aid agencies):

Several governments are supporting WHO/TFI with increased amounts and new donors have joined the list. In all cases, the levels of support are still small relative to several other programs. Canada has pledged support for 4 years (national & multicountry capacity building; FCTC; Youth & Tobacco). Finland: the FCTC process and for Quit and Win; Sweden: Women & Tobacco; the FCTC process and agriculture. Japan: Kobe Conference on Women and capacity building. USA (CDC): TFI regional work; surveillance; information. UK: FCTC working groups, regional/country capacity building, information management; Youth & Tobacco symposium. Norway: regulatory meeting/planning. Australia: broad support. New Zealand: FCTC; Youth and Women. France: secondment of a lawyer and funding for work in Francophone Africa. Netherlands: providing a staff person to continue work on gender and tobacco.

Foundations/private sector:

The UN Foundation is a major resource supporting the projects on Youth; Media; capacity and for the 11th World Conference on Tobacco to be held in Chicago in 2000. The Rockefeller Foundation has made possible the hiring of Global Health Fellows; Glaxo Wellcome, Pharmacia & Upjohn and SmithKline Beecham, through IFPMA/WSMI supported the WNTD 1999; a WHO/Mayo clinic workshop on smoking cessation was supported by Glaxo Wellcome and Pharmacia & Upjohn. Merck & Co. has one staff secondment to TFI. Minnesota Blue Cross/Blue Shield pledged support for the analysis of industry documents and regulation. IDRC of Canada has supported the youth and tobacco project.

Global Research:

TFI has worked closely with RITC (IDRC) to develop a global agenda for tobacco control research. Plans are underway to develop an international dimension to NIH's tobacco control research through the Fogarty International Center. This will bring together several institutes with CDC and FDA.

Today, the tobacco industry has surrendered, and they have surrendered on our terms - groundbreaking terms that will expose the full truth to the public, recover record amounts for taxpayers, impose tough reforms on the industry, and most important, protect future generations of children.

Hubert H. Humphrey, former Attorney General of Minnesota as big tobacco settled the historic Minnesota lawsuit that led to millions of secret tobacco industry documents become available to the public. Humphrey was recipient of the WHO Director General's award on World No Tobacco Day, 1999.

UN Ad Hoc Interagency Task Force on Tobacco Control

WHO/TFI is now the focal point for tobacco control work in the entire United Nations family. The first session of the UN Ad Hoc Inter-agency Task Force on Tobacco Control - the Task Force, under WHO's leadership, replaces the UN system focal point for tobacco that was located in UNCTAD - was convened in New York, 29-30 September 1999 and was attended by 15 UN

Organizations. The principal themes for future work are: Agricultural diversification; Economics; Employment; Environmental Tobacco Smoke (ETS); the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control; Regulation; Risk Taking Behaviour; Trade and Women.

Actions By Selected Key Organizations

FAO:

FAO will lead a project aiming to provide quantitative indicators of future tobacco production & consumption trends under different country-specific tobacco control policies based on detailed country studies. This study would provide quantitative insights into the effectiveness of various tobacco control measures and their economic consequences (Partners: WHO, World Bank, USDA, USAID.)

World Bank/IMF:

Key projects which World Bank and IMF would take the lead on include: World Bank Report dissemination and targeted visits; economic country analyses; and discussion on the process of developing a joint World Bank/IMF/WHO position on privatization. IMF is also ready to provide technical fiscal advice to countries on tobacco taxes.

Strategic Issues

WHO Enquiry:

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

Regulation:

WHO and the Norwegian government will host a conference in Oslo February 9-11, 2000 on "Advancing Knowledge on Regulating Tobacco Products." The objectives of the conference include: to exchange scientific information about tobacco product design and manufacture needed for regulation; to define public health goals of regulation of tobacco products and how concepts such as "safer cigarette and harm reduction" fit within such goals; to identify priority research areas required to advance regulation; to consider administrative options for countries to use in regulating tobacco products, and to recommend whether a protocol on regulation should be developed as part of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.

Global Tobacco Control and the Tobacco Industry

A distinguishing feature of the tobacco epidemic has been the role of major corporations - some of the largest in the world - in promoting smoking and, as a consequence, death and disease. This presents a unique challenge for the public health community. The adversary is not only disease or natural forces. The adversary also includes powerful corporations whose actions are antithetical to public health. As the new century begins, transnational tobacco corporations are increasing their presence in global markets.

Understanding the history, conduct, and behaviour of tobacco transnationals is essential to help guide strategies for tobacco control.