

PRESS RELEASE

25 November 2008

International Law to combat the tobacco epidemic

People and health over trade and profit

The Third Session of the Conference of the Parties (COP3) to the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) drew to a successful close on Saturday 22 November, in Durban.

More than 600 delegates from 130 Parties to the Convention as well as representatives of States non-Parties and other Observers attended this milestone event in the implementation of a Convention designed to combat the global tobacco epidemic set to kill an estimated 5 million people or more every year.

The Conference achieved a broad range of goals and among the highlights, the Protocol on illicit trade has been addressed, based on the report of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Body (Article 15 of the WHO FCTC). The Parties paved the way for continuing negotiations aimed at the adoption of the Protocol in late 2010. Beyond public health concern, illicit tobacco trade, including smuggling and counterfeiting, deprives governments of an estimated US\$ 40-50 billion every year.

On three different Articles of the Convention, comprehensive guidelines have been adopted in order for countries to:

- Protect their public health policies from the interference of the tobacco industry (Article 5.3), which is pushing aggressive tobacco marketing particularly on children and the developing world, and continuing to fuel the conflict between profit and health.
- Ensure that truth about tobacco use be properly reflected in packaging and labeling of tobacco products, including the usage of pictorial warnings that the entire society, including the less literate, can readily understand (Article 11);
- Ban advertising, promotion and sponsorship of tobacco products nationally and across borders (Article 13), which, according to overwhelming scientific evidence, increase tobacco use, especially among children and youth.

Other major issues have been addressed such as the link between tobacco and poverty and a working group has been set up to explore and recommend policy options on economically sustainable alternatives to tobacco growing (Articles 17 and 18).

The governments also set up a working group dedicated to elaborate guidelines on tobacco dependence and cessation (Article 14).

Finally, COP3 adopted the next budget and work plan, reviewed reporting arrangements, and discussed financial resources and mechanisms of assistance to help the developing countries to successfully translate into action at national level their obligations and commitments under the Treaty.

As the first session of the COP being held in Africa, this meeting bore also a strong regional dimension. The continent has been experiencing an explosion of the tobacco epidemic with the vulnerable groups targeted and suffering the most. Also, large areas of it are wholly dependent on tobacco as a cash crop and yet tobacco growing is not yielding enough money to buy food for subsistence. During the discussions at the third session, the African countries have thus been particularly vocal in encouraging governments to demonstrate a genuine commitment to producing results.

Representatives of Bangladesh, Netherlands, Palau, Peru, Saudi Arabia and South Africa were elected as members of the new Bureau of the Conference of the Parties, with Mr. Thami Mseleku, the Director General of the South African Health Department, elected as the President of the Conference.

The Conference decided that its next session will be held in Uruguay in late 2010.

All the guidelines and documentation of the meeting can be found at : www.who.int/gb/fctc

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