

# WHO's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control ... saving lives

## Introduction

WHO's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) is the first treaty negotiated under the auspices of WHO based on its constitution. It was adopted by the World Health Assembly on 21 May 2003 and entered into force on 27 February 2005. It is one of the most widely embraced treaties in United Nations history and has 172 Parties worldwide, including 19 Member States from the Eastern Mediterranean Region. Morocco and Somalia are yet to become Party to the Convention.

The FCTC was developed in response to the globalization of the tobacco epidemic. It is an evidence-based treaty that reaffirms the right of all people to the highest standard of health. The Convention represents a milestone for the promotion of public health and provides new legal dimensions for international health cooperation. Tobacco control-related technical measures adopted by the FCTC can be divided into demand and supply reduction measures.

- Demand reduction measures include: price and tax measures; non-price measures; protection from exposure to tobacco smoke; regulation of the contents of tobacco products; regulation of tobacco product disclosures; packaging and labelling of tobacco products; education, communication, training and public awareness; tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship; and measures concerning tobacco dependence and cessation.
- Supply reduction measures include: tackling illicit trade in tobacco products; banning sale to and by minors; and provision of support for economically-viable alternatives.

Other measures relate to: protection of the environment; liability; scientific and technical cooperation; communication of information; institutional arrangements and financial resources; settlement of disputes; development of the Convention and final provisions.

## Regional impact of the FCTC

The FCTC has impacted the Region by:

- strengthening the legal framework for tobacco control, creating legislation and ensuring its implementation and continued development.
- strengthening partnership with regional and subregional organizations involved in tobacco control.
- increasing political commitment to tobacco control at regional and national levels.
- exposing the underhand activities and tactics of the tobacco industry.

The development of the Framework Convention continues through decisions made by the Conference of Parties, which has convened four sessions to date. The subsidiary bodies, established by the Conference of Parties, have created guidelines in relation to various articles. These have been finalized and adopted by the Conference during the sessions. Five guidelines have been unanimously adopted for Articles 5.3, 8, 11, 12, 13 and 14; partial guidelines for Articles 9 and 10 have also been adopted. Expert working groups are currently drafting guidelines for implementation of Article 6 (price and tax measures to reduce the demand for tobacco), Article 17 (economically-viable alternatives to tobacco growing) and Article 18 (protection of the environment and health of persons).

Whilst all the provisions of the guidelines should be implemented at national level in order to fulfil the obligations of the Convention, the evidence-based guidelines aim to assist the Parties in meeting their obligations without compromising their legal or constitutional rights.



## Towards successful FCTC implementation

In order to achieve the expected outcomes for each of the internationally recommended policies of the FCTC, countries need to establish a multisectoral mechanism; create a national plan of action with clear and achievable objectives; link implementation activities to a timetable; establish an effective monitoring system; and create a built-in upgrading mechanism that allows for easy transitioning.

Strong legislation is needed at national level to strengthen the implementation of the Convention. Tobacco control legislation is one thing but compliance and enforcement are another, and without compliance and enforcement the strongest legislation will have zero effect on reducing health risks. Implementation of the FCTC will be less successful without a strong policy to monitor the tobacco industry at national level or a mechanism for international collaboration. The influence of the industry, the "underlying cause of the tobacco epidemic", should be addressed through strict implementation of the guidelines for Article 5.3.

## World No Tobacco Day 2011

WHO has selected "The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control" as the theme for World No Tobacco Day 2011 to highlight the importance of the treaty, to stress Parties' obligations under the treaty and to promote the essential role of the Conference of the Parties and WHO in supporting country efforts. The messages coming out of World No Tobacco Day will help to save more lives and to limit the damage caused by tobacco use and will shed light on the various guidelines and what is needed at national level to strengthen the treaty.

### The key messages of this year's World No Tobacco Day are:

- Regardless of legal obligations, all Parties have a moral obligation to fully implement the FCTC to save lives.
- The obligations of the treaty should be translated immediately into realities at country level through the creation of national mechanisms.
- Organizations, institutions and civil society should join forces to support government in effective implementation of the FCTC.