

Report on the 16th World Conference on Tobacco or Health

16th World Conference on Tobacco or Health took place on March 17-21, 2015, in Abu Dhabi. This year's topic of the Conference is "Tobacco and Non-Communicable Diseases". Such conferences occur every 3 years and attracts thousands of government officials, academic and health professionals, anti-tobacco organizations from more than 100 countries. The agenda of the 16th meeting covers all possible tobacco control topics, including plain packaging, litigation, taxation, electronic nicotine delivery systems, and also serves as a platform to award countries/organizations that have achieved significant tobacco control measures.

In essence, the Conference served as a platform to reinforce messages adopted at CoP 6 in October 2014 in Moscow, prepare grounds for CoP 7 in 2016, and, for the first time, openly support plain packaging as a truly meaningful tobacco control measure.

The Conference was opened by Margaret Chan, WHO Director General. Key points mentioned:

- Appeal towards MoH in all countries: "Don't be a Maybe" when it comes to fighting tobacco (specific mention that the subject campaign was banned in a number of wealthy countries);
- Smoking amongst males went down in 125 countries;
- New tobacco control measures should be introduced;
- Praise to Australia, UK, and Ireland for introducing PP, call for other countries to follow.

WHO released a [report on e-cigs](#). Key points:

- "from embryonic concept 10 years ago to USD 3 billion unregulated market";
- Health risks of e-cigs: highly addictive, contain chemicals and carcinogenic substances, appeal to non-smokers and youth, unsubstantiated health claims;
- No sufficient evidence that e-cigs help smokers to quit using conventional products.

While CoP 6 could not reach a resolution to ban e-cigarettes, this is a clear attempt to shift the debate towards prohibition. It is, nevertheless, obvious that there is lack of consensus among WHO experts on the issue, with some calling for lighter regulation towards e-cigarettes.

Plain Packaging

South Africa (SA)

SA Minister of Health was one of the keynote speakers at the conference. The Minister mentioned that SA would introduce GHW, bans on public place smoking and plain packaging in the near future [our intelligence indicated that Plain Packaging has not been discussed in the Cabinet. Enclosed please find on what our colleagues in SA are doing on this.]

Turkey

In her speech, Margaret Chan, WHO Director General, mentioned that Turkey is "not far behind" from introduction PP. [The idea of introduction PP in Turkey first appeared in MoH strategy paper in January 2015. The industry in Turkey is called for a meeting to the Ministry of Economy for consultations on March 23, 2015. We will keep you posted on the outcome of the meeting.]

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

In preparation for the UN meeting on post millennium sustainable development goals to take place on March 23-27 in New York, USA, the conference called for introduction of additional FCTC control measures. While on the surface it may seem a legitimate mechanism for member-states to ensure compliance with broad FCTC mechanisms as most UN countries have ratified FCTC, our intelligence suggests that it could lead to the creation of another international body at the UN that would deal specifically with tobacco issues, and not non-communicable diseases in general.

Upon instructions by PMI CA functions, we have alerted all EEMA markets on this potentially alarming development. Despite short notice, many markets have briefed their MFA and/or UN reps and alerted them to potentially bigger contributions out of national budgets (a more completed brief on the actions and learnings will be shared with the Central Task force in charge of FCTC).

Anti-tobacco Trade Litigation Fund

Bloomberg Philanthropies (Michael Bloomberg attended the Conference) and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation announced that they were jointly launching a USD 4 million anti-tobacco Trade Litigation Fund “to aid low- and middle-income countries in fighting tobacco industry litigation.”

Bloomberg Awards

The Conference was also used as a venue for Bloomberg Philanthropies and WHO to recognize countries and organizations that have achieved significant progress in fighting tobacco epidemic. Out of six awards, two went to EEMA markets:

- The Confederation of Consumer Rights (KONFOP) in Russia, for “work in enforcing bans on tobacco advertising and sponsorship”; and
- Regional Advocacy Life Center in Ukraine, for work in protecting the public from the dangers of tobacco through smoke-free laws.

Declarations adopted at the Conference:

- Substantial and regular increases in tobacco excise tax;
- Safeguard farmers from being exploited by big tobacco;
- Reduce tobacco use by 30% by 2025;
- Support countries that implemented or are considering Plain Packaging or GHW over 85%
- All new and existing tobacco products be regulated under tobacco control policy initiatives;
- Exclude tobacco from trade and investment agreements;
- UN should have concrete plans to convene a high level meeting to address this major threat

WHO Future Objectives:

- Accelerated implementation of FCTC;
- 30 countries to adopt Plain Packaging;
- 100 countries to adopt GHW over 50%

- 60 countries to include and implement tobacco control into national health plans;
- Illicit Trade Protocol comes into force;
- WHO FCTC firewalled from the interests of the tobacco industry;
- 15 countries to have 70% excise tax share in retail price;
- All countries implement full indoor smoking bans, including HoReCa, with no provision for dedicated smoking areas;
- 50 countries restrict and prohibit additives in tobacco products, including menthol and other flavors;
- 60 countries to implement complete advertising ban, including PoS Display ban.