

**FCTC**WHO FRAMEWORK CONVENTION
ON TOBACCO CONTROL**Conference of the Parties to the
WHO Framework Convention
on Tobacco Control**Seventh session
Delhi, India, 7–12 November 2016
Agenda item 4**FCTC/COP/DIV/3
7 November 2016****Address by Dr Vera da Costa e Silva
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Control (WHO FCTC):
Seventh session of the Conference of the Parties
(COP7)****Delhi, India****6 November 2016**

Good morning and may I welcome you all – His Excellency the President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, the President of the Conference, Ministers, WHO, delegates, colleagues and friends -- to the seventh session of the Conference of the Parties to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. It's a great pleasure to see so many distinguished representatives and experts from our 180 Parties here, courtesy of the generosity and hospitality of the Government of India.

We meet at the end of an extraordinary period since our last gathering in Moscow. The pace of progress at an international level has been breath-taking and we should heartily applaud the world's determination to make sustainable development an ever more important aim.

A successful campaign by Parties, NGOs, IGOs and the Convention Secretariat last year led to the inclusion of Target 3.a within the Sustainable Development Goals, requiring the strengthening of WHO FCTC implementation. And similar advocacy in partnership with WHO at last year's Addis Ababa Financing for Development meeting secured the agreement that tobacco taxation should be a key source of funds for SDG implementation.

These advances place the WHO FCTC and the work of this COP at the heart of the global health and development agenda for the coming decade. It gives us a tremendous opportunity to agree on unified action against the tobacco corporations whose thirst for profit is slaked only by a flood of human illness and misery.

I am delighted to look up and see the representatives of the Parties, the Non-Parties, and those intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations who are here as observers and who play such an important role implementing the Treaty.

There is another observer here too, although its representatives may not always wear badges. The tobacco industry takes a very keen interest in COP meetings and makes every effort to insinuate itself into delegations and proceedings. If anyone doubts the importance of what we do here, always remember the industry's malevolent presence and the strong need for transparency.

We are also watched by sugar and alcohol products manufacturers, who see the tobacco control movement as a precursor to threats they now face from public health campaigns. These industries fear a united international community acting on behalf of consumers. In the coming days, I hope their fears will be fully justified as we take further steps to end the tobacco epidemic.

This meeting is the culmination of an enormous effort. COP7 will consider the greatest-ever number of documents in our almost 12-year history, the product of subsidiary bodies established under its authority. The lead-up to COP7 has seen preparatory regional meetings organized in close collaboration with WHO. Let me thank the WHO technical team, especially from WHO regional and country offices, for their commendable support. And of course, the intersessional period has also been filled with work by the Bureau to the COP, so I must note the considerable support offered by the Bureau presidency of Dr Oleg Salagay and his excellent vice-presidents and regional co-ordinators.

We must applaud the bold action taken by many Parties during the last two years and it's reassuring that the treaty and the standards adopted by COP have helped you protect your decisions against legal challenges. To name a few examples, Australia, Kenya, Thailand, India, Uruguay, the United Kingdom and France have shown a steady approach to tobacco industry-initiated court cases, showing that international trade cannot expand at the expense of health and human rights. The European Union has implemented a strong tobacco control directive and sent a message to the world by terminating its agreement with a tobacco company. It is also very pleasing that Ukraine, a Party to the treaty, has ended its plain pack challenge against Australia at WTO, leaving us with almost no WHO FCTC Party opposing legitimate public health measures. It is also pleasing to see Vietnam, Montenegro, Uganda and many others rejecting tobacco industry members in delegations attending COP7. In addition, many of you, starting with Panama, are asking your delegates to sign voluntary disclosure of interest declarations. Congratulations for voluntarily promoting the spirit of your treaty, the treaty you negotiated, the treaty you are implementing, the treaty you protect against all odds.

The past two years have been extraordinarily busy. The Secretariat has worked with numerous others to press forward with the Illicit Trade Protocol. At COP 6, there were four Parties to the Protocol, a number that has now risen to 24. Given this acceleration in adherence, it seems likely that the Protocol will enter into force before we meet again at COP8 in 2018.

The Secretariat has supported a wide range of work, including individually tailored assistance to Parties with more than 40 needs assessment and post-needs assessment missions in the last years, 11 since the last COP.

We have helped, for example, on Article 5.3 dealing with tobacco industry interference. And for the first time, we have issued, under the guidance of the Bureau, note verbales requesting that Parties exclude representatives of partially or wholly state-owned tobacco companies from their delegations. By doing this, the Secretariat is adhering to the mandate you have given to us to implement article 5.3 and its Guidelines. We do not question the right of sovereign states to choose national representatives but we must be reminded that there is a fundamental and irreconcilable conflict of interests between the tobacco industry and public health policy.

The Convention Secretariat has also made efforts to increase the transparency of COP, by fostering new forms of engagement, providing a Jumbo Twitter wall. Throughout this week we will have regular press releases and media briefings.

We have worked on new ventures, as per your decisions, like the establishment of Knowledge Hubs to provide global expertise. We have also helped establish Observatories to act as global sentinels on tobacco industry behaviour.

We should also acknowledge the digital revolution, which has provided new avenues for tobacco industry advertising and influence across national borders. The industry can't be allowed to get ahead of us and I would ask you to carefully consider proposals to monitor and confront this threat.

The COP will also, I'm sure, applaud the growing area of south-south and triangular cooperation, where Parties are encouraged to pair up and offer support, advice and resources to one another.

The global progress report shows that Parties have improved their treaty compliance in important areas. Implementation rates have increased significantly on matters like price and tax, and liability.

There is much to be proud of. However, there remains so much more to do. Let me touch on some of the issues we will consider at this COP.

We receive implementation reports from around three-quarters of our Parties. However, one quarter of reporting Parties have not yet confirmed implementation of time-bound measures under Article 8, and, 40% of reporting Parties lack a comprehensive advertising ban. We will actively seek to strengthen these Parties' engagement, and are hopeful that the COP will endorse the expert group's recommendation for establishing practical means of reporting review and support mechanisms.

As the tobacco epidemic evolves, males and females are differently targeted and affected by tobacco use. Many Parties have rightly asked that the COP strengthen the response to gender-specific risks in their tobacco control policy.

The tobacco industry has shifted much of its production to the southern hemisphere in recent decades, where it exploits farmers. Please take the opportunity to view the photographic exhibition in this building which shows the harsh reality of their lives. Articles 17 and 18 are among the most poorly implemented of the Convention and require greater efforts from us.

The Convention is maturing, and we have to adjust accordingly. That means renewing old ties and establishing relationships beyond the health sector. Gaining observer status, for example with human rights IGOs, offer an opportunity to extend the tobacco control agenda.

The Convention Secretariat has also extended ties to key partners, including COP observers. We have been an active member to the UN Interagency Task Force on Noncommunicable Diseases and became a participant of the WHO Global Coordination Mechanism on prevention and control of NCDs. And of course, we have broadened our relationship with WHO, the "mother" of the Convention, whose offices at all levels are valued allies in the fight against the tobacco epidemic.

As with any maturing organization, the Secretariat seeks more clarity on scope of work. Our hosting arrangements with WHO would benefit from some clarification on the scope of work of the two entities, ensuring the Convention Secretariat's authority on treaty matters, guaranteeing our close collaboration, mutual respect and cost-effective use of resources.

This relationship would also be further strengthened, I believe, through better ties between the COP and the World Health Assembly. The effect on people's health of WHO FCTC implementation should be continuously acknowledged in the political agenda, with COP decisions regularly communicated to decision-makers at WHA and vice-versa.

We will also consider FCTC finances during the coming week and I would ask you to bear in mind key points during this discussion.

The Convention has grown enormously since its birth. The number of Parties has risen from around 100 in COP 1 to 180 in COP 7 while Voluntary Assessed Contributions increased by little more than 10%. Demand for our work has increased and will continue to increase when the Protocol enters into force. You can be assured that we are doing our part to ensure accountability, transparency, responsible expenditure and value for money.

We are mindful of the financial pressures faced by the Parties. We sought to cut costs, working with limited staff while delivering on the requests made to us by Parties. We have successfully raised funds and have been greatly assisted by the generous discretionary contributions of some Parties, to such an extent that extra budgetary income now exceeds VAC income. Nevertheless, one third of Parties are in VAC arrears. We have no option but to ask you to consider sanctions for non-payment, as we have exhausted all other possible avenues.

I would ask that you give positive consideration to our modest proposals on VACs. For many Parties, the increase in the contribution is not big, but taken together it makes a difference. Without this, the Secretariat's ability to deliver will be reduced and defences to the treaty weakened. We cannot lower our guard or the tobacco industry will quickly gain grounds.

Our future progress will also be helped by the admission of new Parties, so I take this opportunity to reach out to our friends among the Non-Parties, several of which are observers here. I can assure you of a warm welcome and I can proudly announce that Mozambique is about to become the 181th Party to the treaty.

Let me end by thanking the WHO India country office, the South East Asia regional office and WHO headquarters for their support in the run-up to this COP. I must also mention the extraordinary efforts the Convention Secretariat staff. We work with passion for a great international cause and provide a beacon to other global initiatives. My team has provided wonderful support to the Parties and I would like to praise each one of them for the dedication and patience they have shown me.

It is in your hands, the Parties to the COP, to decide this week which measures to adopt, how quickly to implement them and what reports to commission for COP8. I am certain that COP7 will mark a significant moment in our march towards a tobacco-free world.

Thank you.

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