

Creating a 'smoke-free' generation – a future without tobacco

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Paul Blokhuis, Netherlands State Secretary for Health, Welfare and Sport

Secretariat of the WHO FCTC / P. Viot

"We have a clear goal: to raise a generation without tobacco – to ensure that children born today will never touch a cigarette."

Addressing a gathering of 146 Parties to the tobacco control treaty at the FCTC COP8 talks in Geneva, Paul Blokhuis, Netherlands State Secretary for Health, Welfare and Sport, described the progress in the anti-tobacco campaign that is gaining ground in the Netherlands.

In a country where 23 percent of the population are smokers – and 75 young people each week are starting to smoke – raising a tobacco-free generation by 2040 will be no easy feat.

"Our mission will require raising children in smoke-free environments. This means smoke-free homes, smoke-free schools, smoke-free public areas," said Mr. Blokhuis. "If we want to prevent young people from taking up a smoking habit, we will need to help adults who smoke to quit."

Since 1991, when legendary Dutch footballer, and heavy smoker, Johan Cruyff launched his anti-smoking campaign – before dying of lung cancer in 2016 – television commercials have contributed to a growing public awareness of the dangers of tobacco use.

"We all know smoking kills," said Mr. Blokhuis. "But we need to create an environment where cigarettes are not easily accessible to everyone, young and old."

To do this, Mr. Blokhuis and other Dutch political leaders are partnering with civil society to raise public awareness about the health risks of smoking and lobbying for new legislation to help reduce tobacco consumption.

The anti-smoking campaign has urged the Netherlands Parliament to pass new legislation to **increase the sales tax on cigarettes and to require plain packaging.**

The campaign also has also begun striking at the heart of tobacco profits. **In January 2018, ABP, the biggest Dutch pension fund and the largest pension fund in Europe, announced it would stop investing in tobacco. This has resulted in 3 billion Euros less in investments from the finance sector going to tobacco companies, said Mr. Blokhuis.**

In recent months, another Dutch pension fund Aegon, along with Dutch bank ABN AMRO, have since followed suit and divested from tobacco. Television commercials in the Netherlands now feature advertising from financial companies that are attracting new clients by boasting that they no longer invest in tobacco.

“We need to convince more financial companies that investing in tobacco is bad for business, bad for their profit margins,” said Mr. Blokhuis. “This would be the final knockout for the tobacco industry.”

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