United States Signs Tobacco Control Treaty

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Please see the following press release taken from the United States Department of Health and Human Services website. Please pay particular attention to the prohibition of selling tobacco products to minors.

News Release

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United States Signs Tobacco Control Treaty

NEW YORK -- On behalf of the United States, HHS Secretary Tommy G. Thompson signed the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) on Monday at the United Nations. The FCTC is the first-ever global public health treaty negotiated under the auspices of the World Health Organization (WHO).

The treaty serves as an important basis for advancing public health worldwide. It encourages other nations to establish standards similar to the ones set for tobacco prevention and control domestically in the United States. For example, the treaty contains a strong U.S.-drafted provision against tobacco smuggling, which could help prevent illicit trade in tobacco.

"The United States has long been a world leader in anti-smoking efforts," Secretary Thompson said. "We have committed more resources than any other country to the research, development and evaluation of smoking control and cessation programs, both at home and abroad. President Bush and I look forward to working with the WHO and other member nations to implement this agreement."

Secretary Thompson noted that the United States is making strides in reducing death and disease caused by tobacco as well as in diminishing use, especially among children. Youth smoking rates have dropped significantly in this country among minors -- from 18.9 percent in the mid-1990s to 13 percent in 2002. However, tobacco-related illness remains the leading preventable cause of death among adult Americans.

The United States, with HHS as the lead agency, participated actively throughout the drafting process and negotiations to help achieve a strong and effective instrument for global tobacco control. The World Health Assembly adopted the FCTC in May 2003. The United States becomes the 108th nation to sign this treaty.

The FCTC is intended to provide for basic tobacco control measures to be implemented by all parties through domestic law. The objective of the FCTC is to protect "present and future generations from
devastating health, social, environmental and economic consequences” of tobacco use and to reduce the prevalence of tobacco use and exposure to tobacco smoke.

The demand for and the supply of tobacco is addressed through various means, including smoking prevention and cessation, health warnings on packaging, restrictions on tobacco advertising and sponsorship in accordance with each signatory nation’s domestic law and constitution, and measures to combat illicit trade. Promoting public awareness of the adverse health effects of tobacco use is also a key element of the treaty. Parties must support measures to protect against exposure to tobacco smoke in public venues, and prohibit cigarette sales to minors.

The FCTC is designed to reduce the demand for and the supply of tobacco and promoting public awareness of the adverse health effects of tobacco use is a key element of the treaty. Once the FCTC takes effect, treaty requires partners to:

- Promote public awareness of tobacco control and promote smoking prevention and cessation.
- Include health warnings on packaging and ensure that tobacco product packaging and labeling is not false or misleading, or could create the false impression that the product is less harmful than other tobacco products.
- Have restrictions on tobacco advertising and sponsorship in accordance with each nation’s domestic law and constitution.
- Have measures to combat illicit trade to prevent tobacco smuggling, a provision drafted by the United States.
- Prohibit tobacco product sales to minors.

The treaty is open for signature until June 29. The treaty will take effect after 40 nations have ratified it; nine nations have ratified the FCTC so far. The next step for the treaty in the United States is submission to the Senate, following completion of further interagency review of the treaty.

Note: All HHS press releases, fact sheets and other press materials are available at http://www.hhs.gov/news.