WHO FRAMEWORK CONVENTION ON TOBACCO CONTROL HEARINGS

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Activities of the Organization: The Alliance for Lung Cancer is the only nonprofit organization in the United States solely dedicated to helping people at risk for and living with lung cancer. We do this through a variety of programs and services including a toll-free information hotline, Website (www.alcase.org) informational brochures and manuals, and a quarterly newsletter, Spirit and Breath.

Why are you interested in the FCTC? The Alliance for Lung Cancer helps people most damaged by tobacco — victims of lung cancer, and those at risk for the disease such as former smokers. We hear the devastating stories of people struggling to survive with this terrible disease and try to help them and their families receive the information and support they need. We would like to help eradicate this disease by supporting tougher tobacco controls, worldwide.

Who funds your activities? We are funded through private donations, memberships, and educational grants from pharmaceutical companies.

I will not be able to present this statement in Geneva at the hearings.

1. Should your government support a convention on tobacco control? If so, why? Please illustrate with examples from your own experience.

Yes, the United States government should support a convention on tobacco control. Lung cancer and other tobacco-related illnesses are a global epidemic. Currently, there are about 4 million deaths a year worldwide due to tobacco-related disease. The United States cannot fight Big Tobacco alone. The world needs a strong, enforceable convention that holds tobacco companies accountable and supports governments in their effort to protect and promote public health. At the Alliance for Lung Cancer, we take hundreds of calls a day and emails from all over the world from desperate people wanting information about their disease. We have witnessed the devastation first hand that Big Tobacco has caused and continues to cause. Former smokers always remain at risk for lung cancer even years after they’ve quit. We have taken calls from men and women diagnosed with lung cancer 30 and 40 years after they’ve stopped smoking. We have taken calls from 20 and 30 year olds just diagnosed. And a whole new generation is addicted due to the advertising directed at children and teenagers. Increasingly, the burden of tobacco-related death and disease is being borne by developing countries. We must have a convention on tobacco control if we are to ever eradicate this disease worldwide. The time to act is now.

2. Are women and youth targeted by the tobacco industry? If so, give examples.
One only need look in popular magazines to find ad after ad of women enjoying smoking. The Philip Morris ad campaign “Find Your Voice” is a perfect example. The ads are beautifully designed and crafted, target minority groups, and give the impression that independence and freedom will come from smoking. These ads are in fashion magazines and popular women’s magazines — all targeted to girls and young women. Marketing campaigns offer free cigarettes by simply filling out a form and mailing it in. In many countries, Big Tobacco gives away free samples in areas where young people gather such as shopping malls and rock concerts. Tobacco companies are moving into the marketing of other products with a shared brand name, such as Marlboro Classics clothing, Salem Power Station music stores and Benson & Hedges coffees and coffee shops. Cigarettes are placed strategically in stores for easy shoplifting by kids. One also sees page after page of cigarette companies sponsoring entertainment events in our newspapers and magazines. The tobacco industry sponsors discos, rock concerts and other events popular with young people. The industry has also promoted and encouraged smoking in movies. To circumvent national ad bans, they have begun to rely on global satellite, cable and internet advertising. The message is — it’s still cool to smoke because you’re defying authority and making your own choices in life. Who makes wise choices in life when they are 11 or 12 years of age?

3. **Why should the FCTC deal with smuggling, taxation, or advertising?**

The FCTC is needed to provide strong international controls to eliminate problems that cannot be handled on a national or local level. Examples include smuggling and advertising that cannot be stopped at borders, e.g. internet and satellite television advertising. Approximately one-third of all cigarette exports in the world disappear into the black market for tobacco products. This smuggling seriously harms public health by undermining tobacco tax policies and by making tax-free, cheaper cigarettes available to young people. Smuggling also reduces government revenue that is an increasingly important funding source for tobacco control and other public health programs. Cigarette companies have been heavily involved in smuggling operations. Other factors contributing to smuggling include the lack of appropriate controls on tobacco products in international trade, and the existence of entrenched smuggling networks, unlicensed distribution, lax anti-smuggling laws, weak enforcement and official corruption.

Raising taxes is one of the most effective ways to prevent young people from smoking, because children have less disposable income than adults. Raising taxes also produces substantial reductions in smoking rates in developing countries. And, contrary to popular thought, raising taxes will not decrease government revenues, because cigarette consumption will fall by a smaller percentage than the rise in price. Lowering consumption of cigarettes will also reduce current and future costs to society in health care costs and lost productivity.

4. **How would your community and country benefit from such measures?**

Our community and country would benefit by fewer children becoming addicted to cigarettes and dying prematurely. According to statistics from the Centers for Disease Control, 5,318,682 young people in the U.S. are expected to die prematurely. More than 160,000 people will be diagnosed in the United States with lung cancer this year; more than 156,000 will die. Four-hundred thousand people will die of tobacco-related illnesses. Statistics from 1993 show that the United States spent $53,367,470,000 in medical costs related to smoking. We must address this
epidemic with international tobacco controls or the tobacco industry will continue to get away with murder.

5. What will you do to support the FCTC?
Our organization will support our governments, both local and federal in their efforts to protect and promote public health and the FCTC. Part of our role as an advocacy organization is to raise public awareness about lung cancer and tobacco control issues. We will continue to disseminate information about the FCTC to our constituents. We are available to meet with local, state and federal legislators, provide written testimony, and speak at committee hearings. We are working to strengthen international tobacco control activities at the grass roots level by partnering with groups in other countries through Global Partnerships for Tobacco Control launched by Essential Action.

6. What do you think governments should do for the FCTC?
Local and national officials must rethink their priorities as they respond to this international effort in tobacco control. Federal legislators must stop taking tobacco money and say no to Big Tobacco interests. Our leaders in finance and foreign affairs must become more deeply involved and committed to tobacco control issues. Governments around the world must declare their support for the FCTC and commit to advancing a strong tobacco control agenda. The FCTC, in turn, should provide support and encouragement for national policies and multilateral measures that would curtail the disastrous global public health epidemic occurring as a result of tobacco use. Clear lines of communication must be maintained at all times if this unprecedented initiative is to succeed.