Submission to the World Health Organisation (WHO) in support of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC)

The Medical Research Council (MRC) is the research arm of the national government. This organisation conducts research in a wide range of health and health related areas. A major portion (60 - 70%) of the budget is acquired directly from central government and the remainder comes from grants and contracts from local, national and international institutions and agencies.

South Africa has a well-balanced, comprehensive set of legislation relating to tobacco control. A major portion of this legislation, and pending tobacco regulations, has resulted from research findings produced by the MRC. The Framework Convention will definitely provide the necessary support for tobacco control legislation and regulations in South Africa. The primary aim of our legislation is to protect young people from a life of tobacco addiction.

Fifty percent of the South African population is under the age of twenty and these individuals provide the ideal market for the tobacco industry. The easy access to tobacco products by children is demonstrated in a recent national survey, which shows that 19% of ever smokers initially smoked cigarettes before the age of 10 (Swart and Reddy). A further issue of concern in South Africa is the similar smoking rates amongst adults (24%) and 13 to 16-year old (Grade 8 - 10) students (23%). Data from the Birth to Ten study shows that 60% of 5-year-old children were buying cigarettes for adults. Furthermore 7-year-old children could recognise advertised logos of tobacco products: 78% of the children in the sample recognised the Rothmans logo, for example. The high rate of Rothmans logo recognition is probably due to its indirect advertising through sports sponsorship, such as the National Soccer League Rothmans Cup, (de Wet (et al)). Additionally, the tobacco-using pattern shows that the type of tobacco use is diversified: 18% of the sample used other tobacco products (chewing tobacco, snuff, cigars, cigarillos, little cigars, pipe) on one or more days of the thirty days preceding the survey (Swart and Reddy).

The Global Youth Tobacco Survey (Swart and Reddy, 1999) found that advertisements for cigarettes are highly prevalent in South African communities. They appear obviously
on billboards, newspapers, magazines, event sponsorship and electronic media. This permeates society and elevates tobacco advertising, marketing and sponsorship to be part of normative culture. The expensive and effective marketing strategy of the tobacco industry is, in part, evidenced by the fact that 14% of never smokers own something with a tobacco logo on it. This contributes to the never-smokers’ susceptibility of becoming smokers in the future. Tobacco gimmicks and trinkets (such as lighters, hats, etc) are also very appealing to youth who experience the daily hardships of poverty. The South African youth are, however, now sending a message to the global community in their support for smoke-free public areas - and the FCTC is a responsible step in responding to this call for protection.

The MRC echoes the resolution passed at the recent 11th World Conference on Tobacco or Health, held in Chicago, which states that the FCTC should be strong, driven by public health considerations, and it should not preclude nations from adopting stronger measures. The effect of increased regulation, greater awareness of the health risks of tobacco-use and declining sales in Europe and North America, has created a desperate need for tobacco transnational companies to identify new markets.

A legally binding international treaty on tobacco control is therefore necessary to protect developing countries from being targets of the tobacco industry as the tobacco epidemic continues to spread from the developed world. International transport of cigarettes needs to come under strict control to prevent smuggling (one third of all cigarettes entering the international market are smuggled merchandise). Smuggling cigarettes, coordinated by the tobacco industry on an international level, in a number of countries, needs special attention.

If the development objectives of the world are to be met, it is the responsibility the WHO to assert their authority in developing and ensuring the implementation of a strong FCTC.

Yours sincerely,

Nandipha Solomon
Executive Manager
Corporate Affairs

References
Dehran Swart¹, Priscilla Reddy¹, Blanche Pitt² and Marguerite Holtzhausen¹. The Global Youth Tobacco Survey (gyts) in South Africa: an overview of the results. Poster presentation - 11th world conference on tobacco or health, 6 - 11 August 2000, Chicago, USA