I am the Reverend Albert G. Cohen, Executive Director of the Southern California Ecumenical Council, which for many years has been an accredited Non Governmental Organization with the United Nations. We have participated in all the United Nations environment conferences since Stockholm in 1972 and have considered it a part of our ministry to work for the implementation of the various resulting action plans. We have a special interest in care for the natural environment and in health and safety issues which relate to threats to human well being. We have been active with the Nestle boycott and have done educational work around the climate change challenges, world population problems and women's issues. This organization has a modest budget provided by the local religious community and depends on many volunteers. We are aware of the development of the many UN conventions which have appeared in the last 30 years and believe they are important contributions to writing national public policies around the world.

You are encouraged to develop the strongest possible tobacco control treaty as soon as possible.

We are appalled by the disregard of American tobacco companies for the health and safety of the children and adults who buy their products. In response to restrictions recently imposed on them by U.S. law they now boast of expanding markets which they are developing in Asia, Latin America and Africa. Now is the time to offer the world a tightly constructed, binding treaty which will protect the world's people from sicknesses brought on by smoking, not to mention financial hardships resulting from buying the products. The treaty must be free of loopholes, which will be exploited by the company lawyers, given their track record in this country.

The Framework Convention on Tobacco Control process should encourage participation by a wide range of legitimate NGO's, which does not include the tobacco corporations and their corporate allies, whose mission is profit not health. We look forward to working with you to mobilize public support for adoption of the treaty by this country. Best wishes for success and thank you for your concern.