

Tobacco industry lobbies for flavorful cigarettes

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A man holds a cigarette and a pack with a picture of a cancer patient printed on it at a street in Montevideo, Uruguay, Monday Nov. 15, 2010. Philip Morris International Inc., the world's second-biggest cigarette company, is pursuing a claim before World Bank arbitrators alleging that Uruguay is violating its trade agreement by requiring that anti-smoking warnings cover 80 percent of cigarette packages. (AP Photo/Matilde Campodonico)

(AP) -- Public health officials from around the world agreed this week on some new anti-smoking rules, but others that could have sharply reduced global tobacco consumption remained out of reach at an international conference Friday.

Host Uruguay got unanimous support from the 171 countries that have signed on to the Framework Convention on [Tobacco](#) Control treaty,

encouraging President Jose Mujica to promise a fierce defense of the country's tough anti-smoking policies against a legal challenge by Philip Morris International, the world's second-largest tobacco company.

Delegates at the World Health Organization-sponsored meeting also agreed that [smoking cessation](#) programs should be paid for by national health systems and that governments should train experts to help more smokers quit.

But amid intense industry lobbying, delegates failed to reach consensus on how to encourage tobacco farmers to switch to other crops and how to crack down on illegal cigarette smuggling.

And they were still working toward the treaty's long-held goal - recommendations that governments require ingredients to appear on cigarette labels and restrict or even ban aromatic and flavor additives that make harsh-tasting tobacco more attractive to first-time smokers.

Delegates were still struggling to find language on ingredients and additives that they could agree on before a final session Saturday morning.

"We are not there yet and time is running out. But I am optimistic," said Antoon Opperhuizen, a Dutch toxicologist and economist who is advising the convention's secretariat on restricting additives. "Some questioned: 'Can you really regulate ingredients that make the product more attractive?' And the consensus was that there are tools for that, and you can do that."

What the conference won't recommend is restricting specific chemicals or flavors, Opperhuizen told The Associated Press. He said there are simply too many, and they change too frequently.

"Everything used in food is also used in tobacco," from chocolate, licorice and vanilla to many other flavors and smells, he said. "It's impossible to have a complete list."

Philip Morris and the tobacco growers' lobby say identifying and restricting additives would cost millions of jobs and harm emerging economies around the world.

Public health officials countered that tobacco producers can switch to other crops, and said millions of lives could be saved by reducing smoking.

Smokers worldwide are increasingly facing tax hikes, bans on smoking in some places, health concerns and social stigma, but public health campaigns are taking an uneven toll on the tobacco industry. While cigarette sales declined nearly 9 percent in the United States last year, global volumes fell less than 1 percent to 5.68 trillion sticks for the nearly 901 million people who smoke, according to Euromonitor International.

Asian markets remain strong, making key battlegrounds out of smaller countries around the developing world where growing middle classes have more discretionary income to spend on cigarettes. Philip Morris International, second only to China National Tobacco Corp. in size, now focuses on these emerging markets.

Uruguay is fighting back with some of the world's most restrictive anti-tobacco policies. It bans smoking in private as well as public enclosed spaces and requires 80 percent of every cigarette package to show graphic images of smoking's consequences, from diseased lungs and rotten gums to a cartoon image of a mother blowing smoke at her baby's face.

With several dozen other countries now requiring graphic warning labels on up to 50 percent of the package, Philip Morris is seeking to block the trend by asking World Bank arbitrators to find Uruguay in violation of its trade agreement with Switzerland, where the company has a headquarters.

"The Uruguayan government has done something which no other government has done, doesn't seem to make any sense to us from a public-health perspective and has clearly damaged our investment there," company spokesman Peter Nixon said.

He said the company's monetary claim would be "substantial," although he declined to give a specific dollar amount.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration last week proposed similarly graphic warning labels showing corpses, cancer patients, diseased lungs and rotting teeth and gums to cover 50 percent of each pack sold in the U.S., starting in 2012.

Since Canada introduced warning labels covering half of a cigarette pack in 2000, its smoking rate has declined from about 26 percent of the population to about 20 percent.

But Uruguay is "a little country," Mujica said, whose annual GDP of about \$44 billion is dwarfed by Philip Morris' \$108 billion market capitalization.

Mujica, a former leftist guerrilla who became a determined pragmatist in prison during the country's dictatorship, worried openly only weeks ago about having to hire \$1,500-an-hour lawyers in foreign capitals. But he got support from some deep pockets this week, including New York's billionaire mayor, Michael Bloomberg, who called Mujica to say his foundation would help foot Uruguay's legal bills.

Bloomberg, a former smoker who is now an anti-tobacco evangelist, banned smoking in New York's bars and restaurants and has proposed outlawing smoking in city parks and plazas. Globally, he donated millions for [tobacco-control](#) laws and public health training in 42 countries.

"The tobacco industry is keenly focused on Uruguay because Uruguay's leaders did the right thing around hard-hitting packaging laws," Bloomberg said in a statement, adding that 5 million people die each year from tobacco-related illnesses.

Mujica acknowledged that he is still a headstrong smoker. "This is an enemy that is never defeated," he told the conference.

"I was imprisoned for many years, and to annoy me they would deny me tobacco," he recalled. "One day I told the authorities: 'I won't smoke again.' And I was seven years without smoking. When I finally got out, I started to smoke again. I would have smoked a broomstick."

"This fight isn't finished," he added. "There are many addictions that are menacing life, and they're all multiplied by the great addiction of our time: the excessive love of money."

The Swiss government said Friday that it has nothing to do with the dispute.

"Philip Morris initiated an arbitration case against Uruguay independently and without intervention from Switzerland. Swiss authorities are therefore not involved in the ongoing case. Nor is Switzerland considering initiating a state-vs.-state case against Uruguay," Rita Balddegger, a spokeswoman for the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs, told the AP.

The International Tobacco Growers Association says the treaty threatens the livelihood of 30 million tobacco growers around the globe.

The group estimated that 3.6 million people in just five poor African countries depend on tobacco cultivation. Reducing demand for harsher-tasting burley tobacco could shrink the economy of Malawi alone by 20 percent, the group said as it delivered a petition to the conference Friday that it said was signed by 235,000 growers in 26 countries.

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