

Hearings to start in Uruguay anti-smoking suit

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Uruguay faces its first hearings in the French capital this week in a lawsuit filed by US tobacco giant Philip Morris International against its anti-smoking laws, an official said Monday.

In early 2010, Philip Morris filed a complaint with the World Bank's International Center for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID), seeking damages allegedly caused by the Latin American country's anti-tobacco measures, claiming they violated a bilateral investment treaty and harmed the company.

"Hearings are tomorrow and the day after," said [government official](#) Jose Mujica, noting the parties were meeting with the court in Paris Monday and that an initial hearing would focus on whether Philip Morris met the necessary legal requirements in filing its complaint.

In March 2006, Uruguay became the first Latin American country and the fifth nation worldwide to implement a ban on smoking in enclosed public places.

It also enacted some of the world's toughest [tobacco laws](#), requiring large [health warnings](#) on packages and banning advertising and the use of multiple products for one brand.

Diego Canepa, head of the Uruguay delegation, said the case was being closely monitored internationally and could have negative repercussions for Uruguay.

"Many people are watching this case around the world," he told local radio from Paris.

A first ruling was not expected until May, he added.

In October 2011, [Philip Morris International](#) closed its plant in Uruguay and moved its local production to neighboring Argentina.

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