

Australia urges world to stand up to tobacco industry

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Australia on Friday urged governments around the globe to stand up to the tobacco industry, saying it was confident of victory in a new legal battle over its landmark plain packaging rules.

"Big tobacco will stop at nothing to use every opportunity they can to intimidate countries to not take appropriate public health measures," Jane Halton, Australia's health minister, told AFP in Geneva at a meeting marking World No Tobacco Day.

Australia's pioneering legislation, in force since December, aims to further cut smoking rates by requiring [tobacco products](#) to be sold in drab green boxes with the same typeface and [graphic images](#) of diseased smokers.

Halton addressed a session of the [World Health Organisation](#) (WHO) on Friday, as the UN agency seeks tougher global measures to rein in [tobacco use](#), which claims six million lives a year.

"Tobacco continues to cause enormous suffering and death which is totally avoidable," she told participants.

"We urge other nations to defy the tobacco industry."

New Zealand and Ireland are planning plain packaging rules, despite a tobacco industry-backed challenge to Australia's law at the [World Trade Organisation](#) by cigar-producers Cuba, Honduras and the Dominican

Republic, plus Ukraine.

The plaintiff countries maintain that Australia's law breaches international trade rules and intellectual property rights to brands—arguments that failed to convince Australia's High Court in a case brought by [tobacco firms](#).

"We have said very clearly, we are responsible members of the global community, we will turn up to the WTO and we will deal with the case appropriately and responsibly," Halton told AFP.

"We are very confident. But yes, it's another front that they've opened," she added.

The WHO is concerned that the industry is replenishing its customer pool via new ways of marketing—chiefly aimed at young consumers—despite measures in a 2005 treaty such as restrictions on billboards and TV ads.

"The [tobacco industry](#) needs to attract new victims to replace those who die or manage to quit, just to maintain profits," said Hans Troedsson, the WHO's executive director.

The WHO points to tactics including selling branded clothing, product-placement in reality TV shows, and event sponsorship.

"Whats the solution? A comprehensive ban on all advertising, promotion and sponsorship activities," said Troedsson, adding that such rules drove down smoking rates in countries that enacted them.

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