



World Health Assembly Meeting Report

Geneva Switzerland – May 19-28, 2003

After almost four years of intense negotiations, the FCTC was unanimously adopted at the World Health Assembly (WHA) meeting in Geneva on May 21, 2003. The treaty will be open for signature by countries any time after June 16, 2003. Once a country signs the agreement, they will subsequently have the option of ratifying the treaty in their respective national parliaments or legislative assemblies. Once ratified, Parties will need to implement the measures contained in the FCTC along a specified timeframe.

The adoption of the treaty was received with much enthusiasm by public health advocates. The WHF and other NGOs had to engage in an advocacy campaign prior to the WHA meeting in order to thwart attempts by a handful of countries, including the United States and the Dominican Republic, to reopen the treaty. Specifically, some countries wanted to have the treaty reopened for the purpose of introducing an amendment that would have allowed potential signatories the possibility of opting out of specific clauses. This would have had disastrous consequences on the treaty - weakening it significantly and delaying the treaty approval process. NGOs across the world were genuinely concerned about this potential threat.

Looking Forward

With the successful negotiation and adoption of the treaty in hand, the WHF looks forward to working with national governments as they aim to sign, ratify and implement the FCTC in their respective countries. In particular, the WHF will be encouraging countries to sign and ratify the treaty as quickly as possible. We will also be encouraging governments to go beyond the minimum requirements of the treaty - implementing the strongest possible measures allowed by the treaty.