

**Statement by H.E. Mr John Quinn**  
**Australian Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations in Geneva**  
**Tenth anniversary of the entry into force of the WHO FCTC, 27 February 2015**

Thank you Dr Salagay.

Director-General Chan, Dr Costa e Silva, Health Minister Ferguson of Jamaica, distinguished colleagues, ladies and gentlemen.

It is a great pleasure to be here today to celebrate this major public health milestone. It is also a great privilege to follow previous inspirational speakers, notably Minister Ferguson who has given us such an eloquent personal testimonial on the importance of political leadership in tobacco control.

Over the last ten years, the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) has catalysed enormous progress in tobacco control, contributing to saving many lives and much suffering across the world.

Dr Chan highlighted the significance of the evidence-based approach adopted by the FCTC which has represented a paradigm shift in developing regulatory strategies to address addictive substance abuse – in this case the globalisation of the tobacco epidemic, including in our rapidly developing Indo-Pacific region.

The Convention Secretariat, the WHO, and we the Parties to this treaty can be proud of these achievements.

As many of you know, Australia has adopted a sustained and multi-faceted approach to tobacco control over the past several decades. This has resulted in one of the lowest smoking rates in the world. According to the most recent national data, in 2013 12.8 per cent of the Australian population aged 14 years or older reported smoking daily, declining from 16.6 per cent in 2007 and 15.1 per cent in 2010.

Nonetheless, despite these efforts, tobacco smoking remains one of the leading causes of preventable death and disease in Australia. It kills over 15,000 Australians each year. It costs our economy and society an estimated \$31.5 billion per year. Some population groups, including our indigenous people, have particularly high smoking prevalence, contributing to health inequalities.

That is why the Australian Government continues to press ahead with a broad range of tobacco control measures. In this endeavour, responsibility is shared between our federal and state and territory governments. We are working towards a joint commitment of reducing the adult daily smoking rate in Australia to 10 per cent by 2018, and halving the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rate in the same period.

Australia's comprehensive range of tobacco control measures is fully in line with the provisions of the FCTC. I shall not go into detail on these measures, as I know they will be familiar to many of you.

But I would like to single out one key achievement in Australia's tobacco control journey – about which all of you in this room are already very much aware. That is our world-first tobacco plain packaging legislation, which took full effect in December 2012, together with updated and expanded graphic health warnings.

There continues to be a great deal of international interest in our tobacco plain packaging legislation. And we are delighted to see other countries moving ahead with this public health measure. Distinguished representatives from several of those countries are with us here today. I extend my congratulations to them on embracing this initiative. We also appreciate your solidarity. I see that later in the programme there will be presentations on tobacco plain packaging by academic colleagues, and we look forward to those as well.

Australia's tobacco plain packaging legislation has been strongly supported by the general public in our country, and implementation has been smooth. This measure is an investment in the long-term health of Australians and its full effects will be seen over the long term. But I am very pleased to note that the findings of a number of peer-reviewed studies and reports published between 2013 and early 2015 indicate that tobacco plain packaging is already having positive effects. These include significantly increasing the visibility and emotional effectiveness of health warnings, lowering the appeal of smoking, and increasing smokers' urgency to quit.

As many here today will be aware, Australia continues to defend international legal challenges to the tobacco plain packaging measure, including five disputes in the World Trade Organization. A record number of 36 additional WTO members have joined these disputes as third parties, and we appreciate the support of many of these countries. For the sake of global tobacco control and public health policies more broadly, this is not a dispute we can afford to lose. I therefore urge everyone in this room to engage your WTO representatives on the key health issues also in play in this process.

We will continue our efforts to reduce the prevalence of tobacco use in Australia, looking to the FCTC as the global framework for action – and we will continue to actively support our partners in the Western Pacific region and globally in their tobacco control efforts.

I would like to conclude by acknowledging the very professional guidance and support provided by the Convention Secretariat and the WHO for FCTC implementation, and also the vital contributions of other partners – in particular our civil society colleagues, as Minister Ferguson also highlighted.

Much has been achieved in these past ten years, and we look forward to working together to consolidate these gains, and achieve much more in the years ahead.

Thank you.