

How Gambia acceded to the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products

The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) was signed and ratified by the Gambia on 16 June 2003 and 18 September 2007 respectively.

On 20 December 2016, the Parliament passed the National Tobacco Control Act 2016 which was assented by the President on 30 December 2016. The law was developed through wide input and technical guidance from various sectors and government ministries. It puts a very robust ban on smoking in public places and on advertising, promotion and sponsorship on tobacco and by the tobacco industry.

Prior to this new legislation, The Gambia had already taken several tobacco control measures such as the Prohibition of Smoking Act (Ban on public places, hospitals, public vehicles and government premises) passed in 1998, and Prohibition of Tobacco Advertisement Act in 2003 (Ban on tobacco advertising and promotion).

International, regional organizations and various Nongovernmental organizations provided support for tobacco control initiatives in the country, at different times before and after ratification of the WHO FCTC.

The Gambia actively participated in the Intergovernmental Negotiating Body (INB) which drafted the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products from 2008-2012.

The Ministry of Health and Social Welfare undertook a series of advocacy initiatives through the multi-sectoral working group to mobilize support for the ratification of the protocol. Through the quarterly meetings held in March, June, October and December 2015 respectively, the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare was able to constructively engage representative of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Finance on the multi-sectoral platform, which in turn, have sensitized and mobilized heads of their respective institutions on the Protocol.

The Ministry of Health and Social Welfare also conducted an orientation meeting with different media outlets in the country on 17 – 18 August 2015 to raise awareness on the effects of illicit trade with the objective of eliminating all forms of illicit trade on tobacco products through a package of measures to be taken by The Gambia acting in cooperation with other Parties to the Protocol.

The non-communicable diseases Unit engaged the Honourable Minister of Health and Social Welfare and the Senior Management Team on 8 February 2016 to solicit their support for accession to the Protocol, which paved the way for proactive exchange of the relevant information and consultations between senior officials of the Ministries of Health and Foreign Affairs.

As part of this inter-ministerial dialogue, the Minister of Health and Social Welfare, on 23 March 2016, physically engaged the Minister of Foreign Affairs to sign the instrument of accession which was submitted to the Permanent Mission of The Gambia to the United Nations in New York for further submission to the UN treaty Section in New York. On 26 September 2016, the Gambia acceded to the Protocol on Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products.

The following conditions led to the accession to the Protocol by The Gambia:

1. Strong political will from the Ministries of Health and Foreign Affairs
2. Consistent technical guidance, advocacy and financial support from Secretariat of the WHO FCTC and WHO
3. Existence of a strong and functional multi-sectoral platform in support of the ratification process
4. Availability and engagement of a strong and supportive media network for health (Association of Health Journalists)