

APACT 2013 Conference Statement

APACT was brought to life in 1989 by visionary advocates who sought to cooperatively fight against the power of Big Tobacco in their home countries. Japan organized the 3rd APACT Conference in Omiya City in 1993; we are delighted that the conference has returned here. During the intervening years, there has been marked progress in global tobacco control; the unanimous adoption in 2003 of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) now adopted by 177 nations being the greatest achievement in this regard.

However, tobacco control in individual countries varies greatly across our region. Some nations have demonstrated rapid progress, while progress has been much slower for others. We particularly commend Australia for leading the region in establishing plain packaging, Thailand for standing up to Big Tobacco to require the world's largest pictorial health warnings, and New Zealand for setting an important endgame target.

We regret to see our host country's tobacco control policy improvements have lagged. Its Tobacco Business Act, which tragically promotes fiscal matters over public health, and the powerful presence of Japan Tobacco and other tobacco industry interests in the nation's policy processes ignore FCTC Article 5.3. Tobacco industry interference in government policies is common throughout our region and calls for the immediate and full implementation of Article 5.3 and its guidelines. The tobacco industry has shifted its efforts to greater engagement in so-called Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities, as a further means for policy interference, and requires an immediate and comprehensive ban on all tobacco industry-related CSR activities.

The 10th APACT Conference is carried on these winds of global health, both positive and negative. Best practices for many crucial topics, such as optimal taxation, cost-effective cessation, smoke-free policy advocacy, and great concerns about tobacco and trade policies, were discussed in plenary sessions, the several symposia, and in scientific poster presentations. A record 785 delegates from 42 nations joined this important event.

The 10th APACT recognized the importance of youth engagement in our work. Young people are the leaders of the future to realize the tobacco endgame in Asia and the Pacific. Their meaningful engagement must be at the forefront of all future conferences and meetings in the region.

Just as in 1989, we must still discuss how to cooperatively fight against the tremendous power of Big Tobacco, which relentlessly targets the peoples of the Asia-Pacific region for its deadly profit motives. We will continue working to end the tobacco epidemic and protect the lives of Asian and Pacific peoples.

Supportive statements from symposia:

1. To curb the tobacco epidemic, we recommend (i) accelerated implementation of the WHO FCTC by States Parties, recognizing its full range of measures, including those to reduce consumption and availability, and ask countries that are not yet Parties to consider acceding to the Convention, recognizing that substantially reducing tobacco consumption is an important contribution to reducing non-communicable diseases, which can have considerable health benefits for individuals and countries; and (ii) recognition at all levels of government that smoking cessation is the single most effective and cost-effective treatment for COPD, cancer, and cardiovascular diseases.
2. Each government should adopt 100% smoke-free policies to protect the public from exposure to tobacco smoke in public places, and adopt effective enforcement strategies to ensure compliance. Strong leadership at both local and national government is needed in the development and implementation of smoke-free policies. Regular and recurring evaluation of these policies is needed to strengthen them.
3. Countries should implement the simplest tobacco tax system that would make all tobacco products less affordable over time in order to reduce tobacco consumption and prevalence.
4. Consistent with FCTC Articles 5.3 and 13 and their respective implementing guidelines, the tobacco industry's front groups and so-called corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities should be closely monitored and exposed. Governments should ban all CSR activities of the tobacco industry, divest from tobacco businesses, and exclude the tobacco industry from any legislation requiring corporations to conduct CSR. All United Nations and other multilateral agencies should honor and implement the FCTC by ending any partnerships with and investments in the tobacco industry.
5. We are seriously concerned about the rise in investor-state and state-to-state disputes arising from tobacco control policies, the increasing use of trade and investment law related arguments; and the manner in which these may undermine the political will necessary to implement tobacco control measures.
We recommend that tobacco products should be explicitly excluded from international, regional and bilateral trade and investment agreements.