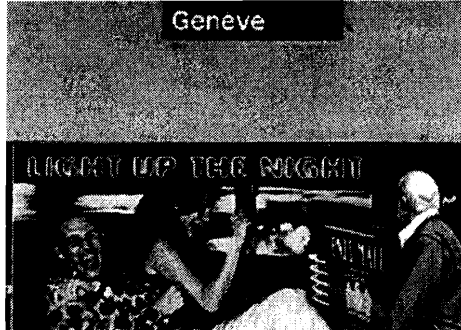


Campaigners want progress on tobacco treaty

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Tabacco advertising has been banned in Geneva since 2002 (Keystone)

Anti-tobacco campaigners are urging Switzerland to ratify within two years a global treaty aimed at cutting the number of smoking-related deaths.

The appeal comes as the Geneva-based World Health Organization hosts its first meeting on Monday to assess progress on the anti-tobacco convention, which came into force a year ago.

The Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) sets out strict deadlines for countries to ban tobacco advertising and slap bigger health warnings on cigarette packets.

Switzerland signed the convention in June 2004 but has yet to ratify it. The Federal Health Office says the country hopes to do so within the next five years, but the anti-tobacco lobby wants it done in half that time.

"We hope parliamentarians can clear the way for Switzerland to ratify this convention within the next two years," Jean-Charles Rielle, one of Switzerland's leading anti-tobacco campaigners, told swissinfo.

"The tobacco prevention lobby will be keeping a close eye on proceedings to ensure the delay is as short as possible."

Political will

Rielle, who is a member of the federal commission for tobacco prevention, said Switzerland's failure to ratify the convention was not down to a lack of political will, but rather the country's slow political process.

He said the cantons, the Federal Health Office and the Tobacco Prevention Association were working together to ensure ratification occurred as soon as possible.

"After years of lies, misinformation and quasi-mafia methods by cigarette manufacturers things have changed in Switzerland," he said.

"Tobacco prevention is now taken very seriously and measures are being introduced to protect non-smokers from passive smoking."

Switzerland has already introduced more prominent health warnings on cigarette packets and banned smoking on trains and buses. Moves to prohibit smoking in public places are gaining ground across the country.

Delay

Philippe Vallat, head of the national tobacco prevention programme within the Federal Health Office, told swissinfo that the authorities were moving as fast as they could but he warned that it could still be "a few years" before ratification of the treaty.

"Switzerland has signed the framework convention and has always declared its intention to ratify it," he told swissinfo.

"We need some legal adaptation on the federal level and we know this will take us some years, including maybe a popular vote on the advertising issue."

Marta Seoane, spokeswoman for the WHO's Tobacco Free Initiative, said the treaty had been "widely embraced" despite the fact that 75 countries have yet to ratify it.

According to the WHO, 121 countries have ratified the convention and together they account for 74 per cent of global tobacco production.

Seoane added that there was no deadline for ratification but the WHO would be monitoring the situation to ensure countries that had signed the treaty followed the process through.

"When a country signs, as is the case with Switzerland, they are in a way committing themselves not to go against the principles that are in the treaty," said Seoane.

swissinfo, Adam Beaumont in Geneva

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<http://www.swissinfo.org/sen/swissinfo.html?siteSect=105&sid=6438318>

Related Sites

Framework Convention on Tobacco Control meeting:

<http://www.who.int/tobacco/fctc/cop/en/index.html>

WHO: <http://www.who.int/en/>

Federal Health Office: <http://www.bag.admin.ch/e/index.htm>

Tobacco Prevention Association (German, French, Italian): <http://www.at-suisse.ch/>