

- International leaders in cancer and tobacco control have announced the launch of an unprecedented multinational effort to promote more aggressive tobacco control measures across sub-Saharan Africa. Called [The Africa Tobacco Control Regional Initiative](#) (ATCRI), the effort will seek to promote the adoption, implementation and enforcement of effective in-country tobacco control policies, legislation and programmes.

ATCRI is being supported by [Cancer Research UK](#) and [American Cancer Society \(ACS\)](#) is hosted by the Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth, Nigeria (ERA/FoEN). The Executive Director of ERA/FoEN, Nnimmo Bassey, said This is an important and long-overdue initiative. There is significant concern that if current smoking patterns continue, Africa will be faced with the loss of millions of her people to tobacco-related disease within the next few years and also be faced with major infrastructure challenges to manage and treat these chronic diseases.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), tobacco currently kills about 5.5 million people every year with seventy percent of the deaths occurring in developing countries. Tobacco companies have in the recent past targeted African countries for development, distribution and marketing of tobacco products because of the limited tobacco control legislation to date.

The launch of ATCRI comes as the World Health Organisation hosts the third Conference of the Parties of the WHO-initiated Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) in Durban from 17 -22 November. The WHO FCTC is the world's first global public health treaty, ratified by more than 160 nations, and requires parties to adopt a comprehensive range of measures designed to reduce the devastating health and economic impacts of tobacco.

John R. Seffrin, PhD, chief executive officer (CEO) of American Cancer Society, is optimistic that ATCRI will go a long way in helping to reduce the burden of diseases, deaths and other costs associated with tobacco use. He noted, This effort represents the first major coordinated, multinational effort in Africa to specifically address tobacco control. It's a crucial step forward to contain a growing health crisis in Africa and one that promises to have a positive health impact in various countries throughout the continent.

Jean King, Cancer Research UK's director of tobacco control, said, We are proud to be supporting this initiative. We recognise that while we in the UK have had some success in reducing the burden of tobacco addiction, our success has meant the tobacco industry has moved to develop new markets elsewhere around the world. In a sense, the west has exported the tobacco epidemic to Africa. The fight against tobacco is a global one without borders, and we wish ATCRI every success.

ATCRI will provide the platform for information sharing, institutional support and capacity building among all tobacco-control stakeholders within the continent. Among others, ATCRI shall:

- Improve access, dissemination and exchange of information on tobacco control.

- Build institutional and human capacity in key areas of tobacco control.
- Build coalition among major players in tobacco control in Sub-Saharan Africa.
- Promote research in key areas of tobacco control.

ERA/FoEN, the hosting organization is also collaborating with other sub-regional institutions such as Observatoire du Tabac en Afrique Francophone (OTAF) and the Mozambique Public Health Association to ensure linguistic and geographical coverage of ATCRI activities.

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