

Submission to the All Party Parliamentary Group on Vaping's COP Inquiry

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I welcome the APPG's inquiry and I hope it will be able to shine some light on this murky issue. In my view, the FCTC Secretariat and the COP meetings are not fit for purpose and have become a threat to global health. In their relentless opposition to vaping and other reduced risk products, they are failing to practise tobacco control by their own definition (Article 1(d) of the FCTC says "tobacco control" means a range of supply, demand **and harm reduction strategies** that aim to improve the health of a population by eliminating or reducing their consumption of tobacco products and exposure to tobacco smoke').

The approach of the WHO/FCTC/COP towards e-cigarettes is almost diametrically opposed to that of the UK. The British government provides a vastly disproportionate amount of funding to the FCTC and gets nothing useful in return. The COP meetings are used by the WHO to encourage damaging regulation and prohibition which has the effect of discouraging smokers from quitting. The UK should send a delegation of strong supporters of evidence-based policy and harm reduction to COP9 and should withdraw funding from the FCTC if the WHO continues to discourage this form of smoking cessation.

I am sure you will receive many submissions from individuals and organisations complaining about the WHO's approach to tobacco harm reduction and offering solutions. I would like to draw the APPG's attention to another aspect of the issue. The FCTC Conference of the Party meetings are notoriously secretive and non-transparent. The public and the press are routinely excluded from the conference at an early stage without a vote being taken from delegates.¹ But there is also a covert element to the UK's approach to the COP meetings that I would like to focus on in this submission.

The government has never disclosed the names of its delegates to COP8 (or any other COP, to my knowledge). We know that four people attended last time, one of whom was Deborah Arnott from the pressure group Action on Smoking and Health. Thanks to a Freedom of Information request, we know that one of the other delegates was based in Geneva. It is possible that this was Andrew Black, formerly of the Department of Health and now of the WHO. We know that Mr Black attended COP7 in Delhi with Deborah Arnott.

¹ https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/524233/response/1258566/attach/2/FOI%201151161%20Barnes%20reply.pdf?cookie_passthrough=1

This is only speculation, however. Thanks to a Freedom of Information request I submitted last year (which I can share with the APPG if it would be useful), we know that one of the delegates was Dr Tim Baxter, Deputy Director of Healthy Behaviours at the Department of Health. The names of the other three delegates have been 'withheld under Section 40(2) of the FOIA, which provides for the protection of personal information'.

Why the secrecy? Why can't the public be told of the identity of the people who are representing them, at the taxpayers' expense, at an international conference? Why is the Chief Executive of an ostensibly independent pressure group (ASH) part of a government delegation? What is the nomination process, what are the criteria for attending, how does one put one's name forward and who decides who gets the golden ticket?

I hope the APPG can get to the bottom of these questions. The process of selecting delegates should be transparent and open to anyone who wishes to attend. The names of delegates should be made public from the outset and an account of what they did at the conference - including what they objected to and voted on - should be made public. This is the least we should expect from those who are representing us at our expense.

I wish you well with the inquiry and look forward to reading your findings in due course.

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