



**Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol
to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products
Fourth session**

Geneva, Switzerland, 24–26 November 2025

Provisional agenda item 2

FCTC/MOP/4/3

15 September 2025

Applications for the status of observer to the Meeting of the Parties

Report by the Convention Secretariat

Purpose of the document

This report provides information to the Meeting of the Parties (MOP) to the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products on applications for the status of observer to the MOP and the related recommendation of the Bureau of the MOP.

Action by the Meeting of the Parties

The MOP is invited to note this report and consider adopting the annexed draft decision on whether the applications for observer status should be granted or rejected.

Contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): All SDGs; in particular SDG 3 and Target 3.a, as well as SDG 16.

Link to Workplan and Budget item: 2.3.1.

Additional financial implications if not included in the Workplan and Budget: None.

Related document(s): Rules of Procedure of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products.

Background

1. Applications by international intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) are governed by Rule 30.1 of the Rules of Procedure of the Meeting of the Parties (MOP) to the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products, which states: “Any international intergovernmental organization may apply, in accordance with its internal rules, to the Secretariat for observer status, which may be granted by the Meeting of the Parties, on the basis of the report from the Secretariat, taking into account the 17th and 18th preambular paragraphs as well as Article 5.3 of the Convention. Such applications, duly endorsed by the governing body of the organization concerned, should be submitted to the Secretariat not later than ninety days before the opening of the session.”
2. Applications by international and regional nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are governed by Rule 31.1 of the Rules of Procedure of the MOP, which states: “International and regional nongovernmental organizations whose aims and activities are in conformity with the spirit, purpose and principles of the Protocol may apply for observer status, which may be granted by the Meeting of the Parties, on the basis of the report of the Secretariat, and taking into account the 17th and 18th preambular paragraphs as well as Article 5.3 of the Convention. Such applications should be submitted to the Secretariat not later than ninety days before the opening of the session.”
3. Further, in decision FCTC/MOP1(4), the MOP invited regional economic integration organizations, IGOs and NGOs to apply for observer status to the MOP at its second and subsequent sessions, bearing in mind the following: (a) any such organization must have the endorsement of its governing body in applying for observer status to the MOP; and (b) any such organization must be free of any association with or influence from the tobacco industry, in line with Article 5.3 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) and its Guidelines for implementation, as adopted by the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the WHO FCTC, including not partnering with or receiving funds from the tobacco industry or any other commercial entity with a vested interest. In addition, in decision FCTC/MOP1(5), the MOP invited competent international and regional IGOs to apply for observer status to the MOP on the basis of their expertise and according to the rules of their own governing bodies, as well as the Rules of Procedure of the MOP.
4. In accordance with Rules 24ter.1(f) and 24ter.1(g) of the Rules of Procedure of the MOP, the Bureau of the MOP shall review the applications of IGOs and NGOs that apply for observer status and make recommendations in that regard to the MOP.
5. In decision FCTC/MOP3(7), the MOP adopted an indicative list of criteria to guide the Bureau of the MOP in analysing applications for observer status and mandated the Bureau to use those criteria in recommending to the MOP whether to grant or reject applications from organizations applying for observer status. In accordance with the MOP decision, any organization that meets at least one of the following exclusionary criteria will not be granted observer status:

A. For international intergovernmental organizations

- A.1 when the work of the IGO does not contribute to the implementation and purpose of the Protocol;

- A.2 where there is evidence that the organization has accepted funding from and/or has a vested interest in the tobacco industry or any other commercial entity with a vested interest;

B. For nongovernmental organizations

- B.1 when the organization's activities are limited to the national scope;
- B.2 when the organization has accepted funding from and/or has a vested interest in the tobacco industry or any other commercial entity with a vested interest; and
- B.3 when the organization is affiliated with the tobacco industry or any other commercial entity with a vested interest, taking into account the 17th and 18th preambular paragraphs, as well as Article 5.3, of the WHO FCTC.

6. Decision FCTC/MOP3(7) also stated that, in relation to the application for observer status to the MOP, "the procedure and requirements established in Rules 30.1 and 31.1 of the Rules of the Procedures of the MOP, and decisions FCTC/MOP1(4) and FCTC/MOP1(5), shall be complied with".

7. By the deadline of 26 August 2025, the Convention Secretariat received, through the online submission portal on the WHO FCTC website, two applications for IGO observer status and two applications for NGO observer status.

Applications by international intergovernmental organizations

African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF)

8. ACBF is the leading institution for capacity-building on the African continent. ACBF has been an accredited observer to the COP since its eighth session. As a specialized agency of the African Union (AU), it enables transformative human and institutional development by effectively implementing impactful programmes throughout Africa. From 12 founding nations to now a network of 40 member states, the Foundation mobilizes expertise, resources and strategic partnerships to strengthen African institutions and advance sustainable growth – aligned with the AU's 2063 Agenda and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals for 2030. In ACBF's application, it stated that in line with its mandate to strengthen capacity across Africa, and building on its role in programmes related to tobacco control, trade and taxation, ACBF now seeks observer status to the MOP.

9. Based on the information provided by the applicant, the Bureau recommends to the MOP that observer status be granted to ACBF.

African Tax Administration Forum (ATAF)

10. ATAF is a tax organization with 44 member countries. It is dedicated to providing policy and technical tax support. ATAF provides support to member countries in designing and implementing effective tobacco taxation policies, while also working to strengthen excise tax administration across the continent. In ATAF's application, it stated that observer status would enhance the capacity of ATAF to support African countries in aligning with global standards, while addressing unique regional challenges they face in tobacco control and taxation.

11. Based on the information provided by the applicant, the Bureau recommends to the MOP that observer status be granted to ATAF.

Applications by nongovernmental organizations

Economics for Health

12. Based at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Economics for Health conducts economic research to demonstrate the effects of existing policies, and charts pathways to new ones that promote healthier populations and more robust and equal economies. Economics for Health strives to help its partners – which are typically finance ministries and related agencies – to measure illicit trade in tobacco products and to develop action plans to mitigate it and to secure supply and value chains more effectively. It is a strong proponent of the central provisions of the Protocol, and works to support its implementation.¹

13. Based on the information provided by the applicant, the Bureau recommends to the MOP that observer status be granted to Economics for Health.

World Heart Federation (WHF)

14. WHF is an international NGO that represents the global cardiovascular community in more than 100 countries through its 200 member organizations, including scientific societies, heart foundations and patient organizations. WHF has been an accredited observer to the COP since its first session. WHF's main activities include advocacy, awareness-raising, capacity-building and convening through global congresses and other fora, to promote cardiovascular health and advance prevention, diagnosis, treatment and care of cardiovascular disease. It is committed to usefully contributing to the implementation of the Protocol, including through raising awareness about the treaty and helping to disseminate outcomes of the work of the MOP.

15. Based on the information provided by the applicant, the Bureau recommends to the MOP that observer status be granted to WHF.

Action by the Meeting of the Parties

16. The MOP is invited to note the present report and consider adopting the annexed draft decision, as recommended by the Bureau.

¹ Economics for Health also applied for observer status to the COP. Its application will be considered by the COP at its eleventh session; the Bureau of the COP recommended that observer status be granted.

Annex

Draft decision:

Applications for the status of observer to the Meeting of the Parties

The Meeting of the Parties (MOP),

Having considered the applications for observer status submitted and contained in document FCTC/MOP/4/3,

DECIDES, in accordance with Rules 30 and 31 of its Rules of Procedure and pursuant to decision FCTC/MOP3(7), to grant observer status to:

- (i) African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF)
- (ii) African Tax Administration Forum (ATAF)
- (iii) Economics for Health
- (iv) World Heart Federation (WHF).
