Eritrea presents some interesting and hopeful opportunities for tobacco control, even though it is not yet a signatory of the FCTC. Prevalence rates in Eritrea are low at approximately 8%, but there is regional variation and anecdotal reports of higher rates amongst young men in the conscripted army.

In this highly-centralized regime with a powerful executive body, approval of proclamations generally indicates the government’s commitment to a policy. Though the Office of the President finally approves all proclamations, it is the national ministries that play the major role in crafting them. Regional “Zoba” administrations also play vital roles in making, implementing and enforcing policies. Notably, a national tobacco control regulation was proclaimed by the President in 2004. Many of the articles of this Proclamation are compliant with the FCTC; however it is largely ignored due to a lack of both political will and public awareness.

The 2004 Proclamation includes provisions for smoke-free schools but there is evidence of non-compliance. As a result, the ATSA team initiated aggressive implementation and enforcement of smoke-free educational institutions. There are encouraging signs that this activity is building a critical mass of broader support for tobacco control and raising public awareness. Recently, both the Health and Education Ministers have publicly stated their strong support of tobacco control for the first time. The ATSA team, though small and not comprised of tobacco control experts, is working hard to press the agenda with the political establishment. Since decision-making in the government is highly centralized, if the president and his cabinet can be convinced of the benefits of tobacco control, there are very good prospects for the enforcement of existing regulations, and perhaps even the development of better ones.
Eritrea¹

Population – 2009 (World & Africa Ranking): 3,800,000 (110, 30)
Geographical Size and Ranking: 124,320 sq km, 107
GDP Real Growth Rate (2006-08): 0.7%
GDP per Capita and Ranking: $700 US Dollars, 220 (2008)
Main Industries: Food Processing and dairy products, alcoholic Beverages, clothing and Textiles, Light Manufacturing, Salt, Cement and other construction materials
Languages: Afar, Arabic, Tigré, Kunama, Tigrinya, Bilen, Bidawyet, Nara and Saho

Official Development Assistance (ODA) –
Total commitments/disbursements – 2007 (gross): 165.7/102.9 Current USD Millions
ODA as a percent of GDP: 7.5%
Largest Donors (disbursements): EC 36.6, Global Fund 11.1, Norway 10.2, Japan 8.4, UK 6.3, UNDP 6, Netherlands 4.4
Tobacco Production/Exports/Imports: N/A

Brief Description of Political System

Type: Eritrea is officially a presidential system.
Executive: Isaias Afeworki has been president since 1993. He is the chief of state and the head of government.
Legislature: As of 2010, there is a transitional Unicameral National Assembly made up of 150 members. Currently, the sole legal party is the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ).
Judiciary: There is a Court of Final Appeal, High Courts, Regional Courts, and Community Courts.

¹ Sources: CIA World Factbook https://www.cia.gov/index.html; except National Statistical Office – Eritrea for population and land size; Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development for development assistance statistics; and FAOSTAT for tobacco production.
Prevalence

Summary: Smoking prevalence surveys indicate that around 8% of adult Eritreans smoke, with 7% smoking on daily basis, while 2.9% use smokeless tobacco products. The Global Youth Tobacco Survey (GYTS) conducted in 2005 found out that 8.2% of students used any tobacco products, with 2% currently smoking cigarettes and 7% currently using other forms of tobacco. Similarly, the Global School Personnel Survey (GSPS) survey conducted in the same year reported that 10.3% of the school personnel smoked on daily basis while 6.4% used smokeless tobacco. The survey conducted by the ATSA Eritrea Team in March 2008, which focused on middle and secondary school students in two Zobas (regions), all grade 12 students and all college students, revealed that 16.4% of the school personnel and close to 5% of the students currently smoke cigarettes. Prevalence rates show some significant variations by sex, age, and Zobas.

Various smoking prevalence surveys have been conducted in Eritrea. The National Non-Communicable Disease Risk Factors Baseline Survey conducted in 2004 by the Ministry of Health in collaboration with the World Health Organization reported that 8% of the sampled population smoked, with 7% reporting being daily smokers. Smoking prevalence showed important variation by age and sex. It ranged from 6.2% for the 15-24 age group to 21.6% for the 35-44 age group, and declined thereafter. Prevalence rates for women are much lower (~1%) than for men. Regionally, it also ranged from 10.2% in Gash Barka to 7.7% in Zoba Maekel to 5.2% in Zoba Debub.

The same survey found that 2.9% of the population (>15 years old) currently used smokeless tobacco. The highest smokeless prevalence rate was for males older than 45 years. Across regions, the prevalence of smokeless tobacco ranged from 6.6% in Zoba Semienawi Keih Bahri to 0.4% in Zoba Maekel. Most users use either chewing tobacco (53.5%) or snuff by mouth (35%).

The GYTS 2005 data, conducted by the Ministry of Health and the World Health Organization, found that 8.2% of school students used any tobacco products, with 2% (2.6% of boys and 0.7% of girls) currently smoking cigarettes and 7% currently using other forms of tobacco. Cigarette smoking ranged from 0.7% in Zoba Debub to 3.4% in Semienawi and Debubawi Keih Bahri. More research will need to be executed in order to identify the precise variables conditioning these different rates across zobas.

The GSPS, executed at the same time as the GYTS, provides notable evidence for higher tobacco use rates among certain Eritrean adults. For example, 14.6% of school personnel used some form of tobacco (17% of men; 6.4% of women). Daily smoking was reported by 10.3% (12.5% of men; 2.7% of women), while daily use of smokeless tobacco was reported by 6.4% (6.6% of men; 5.7% of women).

The survey conducted by the ATSA Eritrea Team in March 2008 focused on middle, secondary and college students. It covered Zoba Maekel, Zoba Debub, grade 6-12 students and all college students. The survey found out that 6% of the sampled students currently use any tobacco product (7.6% of boys; 3.5% of girls). The prevalence of any
tobacco use ranged from 5.6% among middle school students (7% of boys; 4% of girls) through 4.8% among secondary school students (5.4% of boys; 3.9% of girls), 8.8% among Grade 12 students (13.8% of boys; 0.8% of girls) to 7.1% among college students (9.9% of boys; 0.8% of girls). Close to 5% (4.6%) of the students currently smoke cigarettes (6.2% of male and 2.5% of girls) compared to 2% reported in the national GYTS conducted by in 2005. The survey of school personnel working in Zoba Maekel and Zoba Gash Barka further found out that 25% of the school personnel are ever smokers (32.8% male; 1.7% female) and 16.4% are current cigarette smokers (21.1% male; 1.7% female), while 4% of them are ever users of other tobacco products and 2% of them are current users of other forms of tobacco (2.4% male; 0.6% female).

Politics of Tobacco

Summary: There is significant political will for tobacco control in Eritrea. Tobacco control is currently spearheaded by the Ministry of Health, but there is evidence of support for tobacco control initiatives from high levels of the executive branch of the government (including several key ministers).

Overall context

The Eritrean government is made up of the Executive, Legislative and Judicial bodies. The Executive body is composed of the Cabinet of Ministers and the President. Approval of proclamations generally indicates the position on, and political commitment to, a policy by the Government. Moreover, national ministries, their corresponding bureaucracies and regional “Zoba” administrations (there are a total of six “Zobas” or regions) all play vital roles in making, implementing and enforcing policies.

Though the Office of the President, with the help of its legal advisors, provides the final approval for all proclamations, it is the national ministries that play the major role in crafting them. For example, Proclamation 143/2004 – A Proclamation to Provide for Tobacco Control, was spearheaded by the Ministry of Health. Furthermore, the budgets of all state agencies and the Zoba Administrations are negotiated through the Ministry of Finance and approved by the national Cabinet of Ministers (16 ministers in total). The Zoba Administrations, which have their own Regional Assemblies, can also make their own laws as long as they do not duplicate, violate and/or contradict national laws. In fact, most of the day-to-day responsibilities of governance fall to the ministry bureaucracies and the Zoba Administrations, so they are potentially critical to implementing and enforcing tobacco control laws.

There is high level support for tobacco control in the country. The Ministry of Health (MoH) is spearheading tobacco control policy efforts, and oversees health studies and activities in Eritrea. As indicated above, it has conducted various surveys and prepared Proclamation 143/2004 – A Proclamation to Provide for Tobacco Control, the principal existing tobacco legislation. The Ministry of Education, which through 2009, has been under H.E. Mr. Semere Russom, is also supporting anti-tobacco use activities and providing education on health hazards of tobacco through its Life-Skill Based Health
Education and Health Science Technology Education curricula. The curricula on health education cover a variety of tobacco-related topics. Some schools have demonstration kits. Notably, after the recent conference (July 2009) to inaugurate the Tobacco Free School Environment Initiative, the Minister of Education spoke publicly about the importance of this initiative. Similarly, at the conference, Ato Berhane Ghebregziabiher, Director-General of Health Services, representing H.E. Mrs. Amna Nurhussein, the Minister of Health, highlighted the danger of the tobacco epidemic, and expressed the Ministry’s support of the Initiative. The Ministry of Information is also supportive of the anti-tobacco efforts, and it has recently started broadcasting anti-tobacco, pro-health programmes.

During the ATSA-sponsored Baseline Assessment and the initial country consultancy meeting (9-10 June 2008), the Ministry of Defense expressed a concern that many of the young soldiers are smoking and showed an interest in any anti-tobacco use activities and programmes. However, there is no any systematic study of the prevalence of tobacco use among members of the Eritrean Defense Forces, and this is an area that merits attention in the future.

Additional non-ministry key supporters of anti-tobacco use activities in Eritrea include the National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students (NUEYS) and the National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW). These two organizations are actively engaged in promoting healthy life styles and their programmes include anti-tobacco activities. In fact, the NUEYS has fully implemented Proclamation 143/2004 in all of its premises throughout the country.

Although Eritrea has issued a proclamation to provide for the control of tobacco use in the country, it has not yet acceded to the World Health Organization (WHO) Framework Convention on Tobacco control (FCTC). However, it is worth noting that many of the articles in Proclamation 143/2004 are based on and fully compatible with the FCTC. The necessary documents for accession to the FCTC have been forwarded to the appropriate authorities.\(^2\)

**Tobacco Free School Environment**

*Proclamation 143/2004 – A Proclamation to Provide for Tobacco Control*, prohibits smoking or holding a lighted cigarette on the compounds of “educational institutions of all levels.” Moreover, it prohibits sales of tobacco products to minors (under 18 years old), sales or offering of tobacco products in all educational institutions, and distribution of free tobacco products or items bearing tobacco brand names or logos. Approval and promulgation of this proclamation by the Office of the President can be taken as a stated supportive position on tobacco control at the highest level. Moreover, the Ministry of Education issued Thirty Golden Rules, covering all aspects of a code of behavior by students. One of these golden rules prohibits smoking and the use of any tobacco product by students inside school compounds.

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\(^2\)“Accession” is a one-step process equivalent to ratification.
However, due to lack of enforcement of the Proclamation, this initial step forward in tobacco control is not yet as monumental as expected. For example, there is corroborated anecdotal evidence of school personnel smoking in school compounds; over one-third of current cigarette smokers and 69% of current smokeless tobacco users consumed tobacco products in school premises such as tea rooms and staff lounges. Moreover, ATSA team members have observed the selling of cigarettes in school compounds; and street vendors and shops also sell cigarettes at or close to school gates providing students easy access to cigarettes.

Government institutions are expected to support the Tobacco-Free Schools Initiative (TFSEI) because it is in line with the provisions of Proclamation 143/2004. However, some bureaucrats who smoke may not be enthusiastic. These actors will need to be monitored for compliance to existing laws.

The Zoba Administrations are powerful and work in very close connection with the schools. Every Zoba Administration has a Director-General for Social Service (DGSS), who is responsible for any activities in schools and schools report directly to him. They also have Heads of Zoba MoE and Zoba MoH Branch Offices. All of these functionaries bear the responsibility to implement any pertinent government proclamations. The ATSA team believes that if they are convinced of the importance of the TFSEI, they can take it as part of their mandate, and oversee its effective implementation in their respective schools.

The National Board of Higher Education (NBHE) is another potential ally. All Institutes of Higher Education (IHE) are under the NBHE. The Executive Director of the NBHE expressed his position on tobacco use in his opening speech at the initial country consultancy meeting, and promised to support the research team in all its activities. The ATSA team has received excellent support from him. Some colleges such as the College of Health Sciences and Orotta School of Medicine have expressed their interest in the anti-tobacco drive in the country and are even working to include it in their curricula. Moreover, the IHE have a pool of expertise (sociologists, anthropologists, health professionals, biomedical researchers, demographers, etc.) that can easily be tapped to conduct research and generate the knowledge required to influence policy and decision makers.

In Eritrea, all IHE institutions are fully and completely funded by the government and, to the best of the knowledge of the ATSA team members, there is no direct linkage between BAT-Eritrea and any IHE in the form of funding or scholarships. Similarly, no school has so far any of its activities sponsored and/or supported by BAT-Eritrea.

Tobacco Industry Monitoring

Summary: The tobacco industry is dominated by British American Tobacco, which holds monopoly rights to manufacturing. The firm maintains a strong and visible presence. There is also a strong retail and distribution network that has an interest in continued tobacco sales. While there is some leaf cultivation, it is a very small industry.
**Background**

Tobacco may have been introduced to Eritrea in the 16th Century by Portuguese soldiers or travelers (Amanuel, 2007). In the second half of the 19th Century, the Senhit area (particularly around Keren) was producing and exporting tobacco to Egypt. One of the popular brands (Nargile and chew) in Egypt at that time, “Senahit”, may have derived its name from Senhit (now a province in modern Eritrea).

In the 1900s, the Italians were conducting tests on local varieties, but Keren tobacco was found to be poor in combustion and the project was abandoned. In 1918, interest in tobacco was revived, and cultivation increased around Keren, and other localities, probably in Tokombia, Ghinda, and Segheneiti. Anecdotal discussions with elders suggest that the Italians were distributing cigarettes to Eritrean soldiers (*Ascaris*) as part of their salary.

In 1920, a Greek company, Mina Ananistilia, was established and started to produce hand rolled cigarettes using hand tools. A cigarette without a filter, with the brand name of “Ideal”, was produced. In 1929, the company was taken over by the Italian government and renamed “Monopolio Tobacco Del’Eritrea” (Amanuel, 2007, Mulugeta, 2005). The Italians renovated it by bringing new machinery, Excelcer from Holland, and its capacity increased to 300 cigarettes per minute.

In 1941, the British Military Administration (BMA) took over the factory and brought secondhand machinery from Egypt which enabled 600-700 cigarettes to be produced per minute. In 1959, there were two tobacco farms in Tokombia owned by Italians, namely *Azienda Agricola Camozzi Giovani* and *Azienda Agricola Gabba Pietro*. The latter was experimenting with various exotic varieties, but production was for local consumption. In 1962, the Ethiopian government took over the cigarette factory and renamed it “Tobacco Monopoly of Ethiopia”. In 1976, it was again renamed “Asmara Cigarette Factory”. In 1988, new machinery was installed. This modernization raised the production capacity of the factory to 2,500 cigarettes per minute. A new “Ideal” cigarette brand with a filter was produced.

After the liberation of Eritrea in 1991, the factory’s name was changed to “Gash Cigarette Factory” (GCF). The GCF was privatized and acquired by Rothmans of Pall Mall in 1998. A year later, British American Tobacco (BAT) and Rothmans merged, and the merged company took the BAT appellation. As Table 1 presents, the latest data (2000) demonstrate that local cigarettes continue to make up the largest proportion of tobacco products consumed in Eritrea, though there is also an import market and an informal market of less processed products.
Production:
BAT-Eritrea is the only tobacco manufacturing company in Eritrea. As Table 2 reports, the gross output of cigarettes of the British American Tobacco company in Eritrea increased steadily from 1995 onwards and reached its peak of 220 million Nakfa in 2005. Privatization of the company and introduction of new advanced production technology by BAT increased the production capacity of the company five-fold. However, due to the lack of foreign currency, the production of cigarettes dwindled in 2006, and though no firm statistics are available, it is widely believed to have been increasing since 2006.

Table 2 - Production by Value – 1995-2006
Due to Eritrea’s geographical isolation – it has long, sparsely-populated borders with Sudan and Ethiopia, as well as a lengthy Red Sea coast – smuggling presents a concern. During 1995-2007, it is estimated by government agencies that approximately 20 million Nakfa worth of cigarettes and chewing tobacco were smuggled into Eritrea (more cigarettes than chewing tobacco). Government officials believe that smuggling activities have increased since 2006, but more research on identifying the origins of the smuggled products needs to be done. Additionally, the reasons for smuggling (e.g. price differentials) need to be explored systematically by researchers.

**Employment:** According to data obtained from the Ministry of Industry and Trade, the number of employees in the tobacco industry declined from 139 in 1995 prior to privatization of the company to 41 persons in 2006. The main reason for the decline is the modernization and automation of production facilities by BAT.

Employment in the Eritrean tobacco sector, however, is likely to be much higher in retail contexts (street vendors, agents for BAT, small shopkeepers) than in tobacco production or processing. There is ample anecdotal evidence of children hawking cigarettes on street corners to supplement meager family incomes.

**Advertising and promotions** – BAT, Eritrea’s primary tobacco supplier, boasts of a strong public presence. It has a monopoly right to sell tobacco products in Eritrea. This means that without the permission of BAT-Eritrea no one can sell cigarettes in Eritrea. It is technically legal to import non-BAT brands, for example, by those dealing in duty-free commerce, or when there is a supply shortage of BAT products. There are 19 wholesalers and 6,500 retailers duly licensed to sell BAT cigarettes in Eritrea. Although government bans advertising of cigarettes, BAT apparently gives out pens, pencils, bags, T-shirts, jackets, and other youth-centric items that carry tobacco company logos in direct violation of Proclamation 143/2004. Moreover, BAT uses point-of-purchase marketing techniques to promote its tobacco products. In terms of Corporate Social Responsibility activities, BAT employees in Eritrea take part in occasional community service events, such as a mass planting of several hundred trees to mitigate soil erosion.¹

**Inventory of Existing Laws and Regulations**

Proclamation 143/2004 governs tobacco control in Eritrea. It forbids smoking in all public places, sales of tobacco products to minors, and all tobacco advertising; and mandates that all tobacco packages contain a health warning, preferably on 50% or more but no less than 30% of the principal display area. Yet, as the ATSA proposal’s introduction freely admits, the political will embodied in Proclamation 143/2004 has proven mostly toothless because neither institutional will nor broad public awareness for its effective implementation existed.

The enforcement of specific provisions in Proclamation 143/2004 has been fraught with difficulties. For example, the Proclamation forbids smoking or holding a lighted cigarette
on the grounds of “educational institutions of all levels”. Despite a clear ban, some tearooms and staff lounges continue to offer cigarettes and street vendors often sell tobacco products right up against school gates.

Advertising, Promotion and Sponsorship

**Summary:** Proclamation 143/2004 has provisions for total bans on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship. Implementation of these provisions in the proclamation is currently being studied rigorously.

This proclamation prohibits advertisement and promotion of tobacco products as well as sponsorship by the tobacco industry, which extends to the sale or distribution of any item carrying the distinguishing marks of a tobacco product as well as to the offer of consideration, gift, bonus, or promise to any person as related to a tobacco product.

- The Proclamation bans any tobacco ads and/or promotional activates, but there is still significant exposure to tobacco advertisements and promotional messages in various ways, particularly exposure to non-Eritrean TV channels. The survey conducted by the ATSA team showed that:
  - 37% of the students and 33% of school personnel said they saw tobacco ads in magazines, on the Internet, etc. in past 30 days,
  - 41% of the students and 46% of school personnel said they saw tobacco ads on billboards,
  - 52% of the students and 47% of school personnel said they see tobacco ads when they watch sports or cultural events,
  - 11% of the students said they have an item with a tobacco logo or tobacco company name on it,
  - 1.7% of the students and 2% of the school personnel were offered free cigarettes by a tobacco industry agent,
  - 91% of the students reported that they watch actors smoking cigarettes when they watch films.

As yet, there is no body that takes the responsibility to enforce and monitor the Proclamation. Without such a body, violators could go unpunished.

Packaging and Labeling

**Summary:** Proclamation 143/2004 has explicit provisions for warning labels on tobacco packaging including rotating text warnings of at least 50% of the surface of the package. The ATSA documents suggest that this part of the proclamation has been implemented and/or enforced effectively for BAT products, though other imported or smuggled cigarettes do not generally meet the requirement.

This proclamation requires that each unit packet and package of tobacco products and any outside packaging and labeling of such products carry health warnings describing the
harmful effects of tobacco use and may include other appropriate messages. These warnings and messages:

- i) shall be approved by the Ministry of Health
- ii) shall be rotating;
- iii) shall be large, clear, visible and legible;
- iv) should be 50% or more of the principal display areas but shall be no less than 30% of the principal display areas.
- v) may be in the form of or include pictures or pictograms.

**Smoke-free Policies**

**Summary:** Proclamation 143/2004 bans smoking in all public places and all private workplaces (and identifies such places explicitly where one is not permitted to smoke). All such places are to be signed according to the law, and technically there are financial penalties in place for violations. However, the proclamation has not been well implemented or enforced, and is flagrantly ignored. As a result of the general failure of enforcement of the proclamation in educational institutions, the ATSA team has undertaken the first step of implementing and enforcing smoke-free educational institutions, in conjunction with the Ministries of Health and Education.

**Taxation**

**Summary:** The Eritrean government levies excise taxes (100%), sales taxes (12%) and custom import duties (25%) on tobacco and related products. The retail price of a packet of cigarettes (20 sticks) at present is 25 ERN. These measures, however, are not designed specifically to affect affordability of tobacco products, and/or as an actual tobacco control measure.

**Tobacco Control Community**

**The Ministry of Health:** The Ministry of Health has been spearheading the fight against the tobacco epidemic since the early 1990s by promulgating tobacco control laws and educating the general public regarding the health hazards of tobacco use. The Department of Regulatory Services and other departments at the Ministry of Health play a vanguard role in curbing the tobacco use epidemic in Eritrea.

**Tobacco Free School Environment Initiative in Eritrea:** The ATSA team is comprised of 13 members representing various ministries and organizations in Eritrea such as the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, Higher Learning Institutions, the National Statistics Office, the National Union of Eritrean Students and the Youth and National Union of Eritrean Women. The team has been working on establishing smoke-free educational institutions since September 2008. First, the team conducted a baseline assessment during April/May 2008 and completed a mapping phase of the situational analysis in July 2009. As of early 2010, the team was working on implementing and
enforcing smoke-free environment in schools and higher learning institutions in Eritrea. The project was funded by the International Development Research Centre with funds from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Dr. Zemenfes Tsighe is the team leader and Dr. Stifanos Hailemariam is its co-project leader of the ATSA Tobacco Free School Environment in Eritrea project.

\footnote{See http://www.tobacco.org/news/228712.html.}