

Quit Like Sweden: On its 20th Anniversary, Global Treaty Needs a New Ally

20 years after the landmark FCTC treaty, smoking still kills 8 million yearly. Quit Like Sweden says: it's time to act, following Sweden's successful model.

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Suely Castro

UNITED KINGDOM, May 29, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- On the 20th anniversary of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), health advocates are urging governments to acknowledge that smoking still claims nearly 8 million lives every year, and is expected to rise to 10 million by 2030.

Quit Like Sweden, the non-profit platform helping countries to understand Sweden's success in reducing smoking prevalence by offering a variety of alternatives, which has enabled Sweden to be on the cusp of achieving smoking free status. Governments and political leaders must now look ahead: not just at how far we've come, but how far we can still go.

Quit Like Sweden founder Suely Castro said: “Despite widespread adoption of the FCTC, the challenge remains enormous. More than 1.3 billion people still smoke. That's 200 million years of life lost annually.”

Twenty years ago, just as the FCTC was being adopted, smokers began accessing the first vape products that could realistically replace cigarettes. It was the beginning of a new approach: tobacco harm reduction, the chance to separate nicotine (the substance smokers seek) from the smoke (the substance that kills them).

Though mentioned in Article 1 (d) of the FCTC, harm reduction was never fully embraced. Instead, many governments banned or restricted products like vapes, nicotine pouches, and heated tobacco, unintentionally leaving smokers with limited choices.

One country, however, made a different choice.

“Today, Sweden is poised to become the world's first officially smoke-free nation, with a smoking rate of just 5.3%, five times lower than the EU average of 24%,” Ms Castro said.

By making safer alternatives accessible, acceptable, and affordable, Sweden gave smokers real choices. The results:

- Smoking-related mortality in Sweden is less than half of the EU average.
- Tobacco related cancer incidence is 41% lower than the EU average
- If the entire EU had adopted Sweden's model from 2000 to 2019, an estimated 2.9 million lives and 108 million healthy life years could have been saved.

"These aren't just numbers," said Ms Castro. "They are family and friends who might still be here today."

Other countries are following suit. New Zealand has halved its smoking rate in five years, particularly among Māori and other vulnerable groups, by giving adults access to vaping. Japan, thanks to heated tobacco, has cut smoking by over 50% since 2015. Similar momentum is seen in the UK and Czechia.

Yet many countries remain stuck, prioritising prohibition over pragmatism and conflating smoking with any nicotine consumption.

"Tobacco harm reduction isn't a threat to the FCTC," said Ms Castro. "It's an integral part of it."

"The Swedish Experience is not a cultural anomaly," Castro said. "It's a replicable public health approach. It's what happens when science and innovation meet policy, and when compassion meets common sense."

"Because saving lives isn't about ideology. It's about outcomes. And Sweden's outcomes speak for themselves."

Suely Castro

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