The president of Uruguay, Tabaré Vázquez, met with The Union’s regional coordinator for tobacco control in Latin America, and other partner organisations in the fight against tobacco, to discuss Uruguay’s leading role in tobacco control and the country’s next steps in this global fight.

Over the past 10 years, Uruguay has implemented one of the strongest and most comprehensive sets of tobacco control measures in the world. This has led to a dramatic drop in tobacco consumption among teenagers and young adults from 30% in 2003 to 13% in 2011, and the country’s indoor smoking ban has been linked to a 22% reduction in hospital admissions for acute myocardial infarction. Meanwhile, Philip Morris has sued Uruguay, arguing that the country’s anti-smoking legislation harms its trademarks and investments – the outcome of this litigation is expected to have a profound impact on tobacco control worldwide.

Despite the ongoing legal challenges from the tobacco industry, President Tabaré Vázquez has committed to furthering his country’s landmark tobacco control policies, including tax increases and plain packaging initiatives. He also intends to promote regional cooperation to tackle illicit trade and non-communicable diseases in the context of Mercosur.

The Union has worked closely with the Uruguayan Ministry of Health to implement these extensive reforms and has pledged its continuing support to pursue, protect and document the impact of tobacco control legislation; to strengthen monitoring and inspection mechanisms; and to develop and implement a five-year sustainability plan. The Union’s current tobacco control work in Uruguay comes from a grant from the Bloomberg Initiative to develop policy infrastructure.