

WHO Statement on Philip Morris funded Foundation for a Smoke-Free World

28 September 2017
Statement

On 13 September 2017, tobacco company Philip Morris International (PMI) announced its support for the establishment of a new entity - the Foundation for a Smoke-Free World. PMI indicated that it expects to support the Foundation by contributing approximately USD 80 million annually over the next 12 years.

The UN General Assembly has recognized a “fundamental conflict of interest between the tobacco industry and public health.” (1) WHO Member States have stated that “WHO does not engage with the tobacco industry or non-State actors that work to further the interests of the tobacco industry”, (2) the Organization will therefore not engage with this new Foundation.

Article 5.3 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) obliges Parties to act to protect public health policies from commercial and other vested interests of the tobacco industry in accordance with national law. Guidelines for implementation of Article 5.3 state clearly that governments should limit interactions with the tobacco industry and avoid partnership. These Guidelines are also explicit that Governments should not accept financial or other contributions from the tobacco industry or those working to further its interests, such as this Foundation.

Strengthening implementation of the WHO FCTC for all tobacco products remains the most effective approach to tobacco control. Policies such as tobacco taxes, graphic warning labels, comprehensive bans on advertising, promotion and sponsorship, and offering help to quit tobacco use have been proven to reduce demand for tobacco products. These policies focus not just on helping existing users to quit, but on preventing initiation.

If PMI were truly committed to a smoke-free world, the company would support these policies. Instead, PMI opposes them. PMI engages in large scale lobbying and prolonged and expensive litigation against evidence-based tobacco control policies such as those found in the WHO FCTC and WHO’s MPOWER tobacco control, which assists in implementation of the WHO FCTC. For example, just last year PMI lost a six year investment treaty arbitration with Uruguay, in which the company spent approximately US\$ 24 million to oppose large graphic health warnings and a ban on misleading packaging in a country with fewer than four million inhabitants.

There are many unanswered questions about tobacco harm reduction (3), but the research needed to answer these questions should not be funded by tobacco companies. The tobacco industry and its front groups have misled the public about the risks associated with other tobacco products. This includes promoting so-called light and mild tobacco products as an alternative to quitting, while being fully aware that those products were not less harmful to health. Such misleading conduct continues

today with companies, including PMI, marketing tobacco products in ways that misleadingly suggest that some tobacco products are less harmful than others.

This decades-long history means that research and advocacy funded by tobacco companies and their front groups cannot be accepted at face value. When it comes to the Foundation for a Smoke-Free World, there are a number of clear conflicts of interest involved with a tobacco company funding a purported health foundation, particularly if it promotes sale of tobacco and other products found in that company's brand portfolio. WHO will not partner with the Foundation. Governments should not partner with the Foundation and the public health community should follow this lead.

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1. General Assembly Resolution 66/2, Political Declaration of the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases, A/RES/66/2 (24 January 2012), para. 38
 2. World Health Assembly Resolution, WHO Framework of Engagement with Non-State Actors, WHA69.10, 28 May 2016, para. 44.
 3. [Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems and Electronic Non-Nicotine Delivery Systems \(ENDS/ENNDS\)](#), Report by WHO, Conference of the Parties to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, Seventh Session, Delhi, (7 – 12 November 2016), FCTC/COP/7/11.

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