



STOPPING TOBACCO  
ORGANIZATIONS & PRODUCTS

12 September 2019

Secretary-General  
António Guterres  
UNITED NATIONS  
New York, NY  
10027

Dear Secretary-General Guterres,

I hope this finds you well.

I am writing to you as the Board Chair of STOP (Stopping Tobacco Organizations and Products), a global initiative that seeks to halt the tobacco industry's disruption of and interference in pro-health policies around the globe.

Today, we write to alert your office about **the tobacco industry's attempts to influence policy at the United Nations, including through various events linked to the UN General Assembly (UNGA). We respectfully urge you to request that UN officials and UN delegates reject any invitations to events or for partnerships with the tobacco industry.** Meeting with industry representatives is contrary to the United Nations' Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.

One such invitation to the industry is anticipated from Concordia, which hosts, at the margins of UNGA, a high-profile side event on partnerships that features Philip Morris International (PMI) officials. Last year, the Director General of the World Health Organization had to pull out of the event at the last minute upon discovering the PMI sponsorship. Earlier this year, the PMI-sponsored Latin America Concordia event in Bogotá, Colombia featured former Spanish president José María Alfredo Aznar López who has been lobbying Latin American countries to promote IQOS, the tobacco company's flagship tobacco device.

The efforts of the tobacco industry are pernicious and pervasive. Last year, pro-tobacco parliamentarians intervened at UN civil society hearings on noncommunicable diseases to advocate against tobacco taxes and assert that tobacco companies should be treated as partners in reducing smoking. We know from decades of deception that this is not their true intention.

Furthermore, recently, the Transnational Alliance to Combat Illicit Trade (TRACIT), an organization sponsored by tobacco companies<sup>i</sup>, co-organized with the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) a forum to discuss the role of illicit trade in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals. In this forum, it released a report prominently displaying the SDG logos, acting as though it was in step with our public health goals.<sup>ii</sup> It clearly isn't.

And just last month, we joined the public health community in expressing concern about the memo of the then-departing UN official Michael Møller which sought to reconsider the exclusion of the tobacco industry from the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

In short, tobacco companies are seeking access to the UN to influence its policy and burnish their image. The industry's attempt to associate with the UN, its agencies, events and programs, including the UN SDGs, is part of its marketing strategy to sell nicotine products, including to unsuspecting teens

vulnerable to addiction. Studies<sup>iii</sup> have clearly demonstrated how tobacco production and use hinder the achievement of the SDGs by causing death, disease and disability, as well as further poverty. Every year, the tobacco industry's products claim 8 million lives and are responsible for at least USD 1.4 trillion in economic losses worldwide; they leave behind a devastating trail of social, economic, environmental and health harms.

Any links with the UN, its agencies and events lend legitimacy to the tobacco industry and add to its ability to sell its lethal products. We would appreciate your office's response to our call by discouraging UN entities and delegations from accepting funds from or partnering with tobacco companies. We also seek your support to encourage the adoption of the model policy for UN agencies to prevent tobacco industry interference, in accordance with Article 5.3 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC), in clear recognition of the importance of strengthening the implementation of the WHO FCTC for the purpose of achieving the SDGs.<sup>iv</sup>

We are secure in the knowledge that the UN's charter does not allow the UN's governing body and its entities to be complicit in the tobacco industry's marketing plans. But we rely entirely on your leadership to ensure that the UN will act in a manner consistent with the institution's longstanding principles to protect its credibility and integrity.

**It is in this light that we seek your support in demonstrating that the UN does not entertain tobacco partnerships or endorse any events sponsored by tobacco companies or those who further its interests. We call on you to remind UN officials and UNGA delegates to reject participation in tobacco industry-linked events and to prevent or correct any perception of tobacco partnership with the UN.**

Sincerely,



Sandra Mullin

Senior Vice President, Vital Strategies and

Partner in **STOP (Stopping Tobacco Organizations and Products)**

cc: UN Economic and Social Council  
UN Development Programme  
UN Global Compact

STOP (Stopping Tobacco Organizations and Products) is a global tobacco industry watchdog whose mission is to expose the tobacco industry strategies and tactics that undermine public health. STOP is funded by Bloomberg Philanthropies and is a partnership between The Global Centre for Good Governance in Tobacco Control, The Tobacco Control Research Group at the University of Bath, The Union's Department of Tobacco Control, and Vital Strategies.



<sup>i</sup> See TRACIT web page on Partners, available at <https://www.tracit.org/partners.html> (accessed 01 September 2019).

<sup>ii</sup> UNCTAD and TRACIT. Dialogue on Illicit Trade and the Sustainable Development Goals. 18 July 2019. Geneva, Switzerland. See web pages regarding the same by UNCTAD available at <https://unctad.org/en/Pages/MeetingDetails.aspx?meetingid=2182>; and by TRACIT, as a "featured event" on its home page, available at <https://www.tracit.org/>, on its events web page, available at <https://www.tracit.org/event-dialogue-on-illicit-trade-and-the-sdgs.html>. All websites/webpages accessed on 01 September 2019). Copies of the report entitled, Mapping the Illicit Trade on the Sustainable Development Goals. 2019 are available on both UNCTAD's and TRACIT's websites: [https://unctad.org/meetings/en/Contribution/DITC2019\\_TRACIT\\_IllicitTradeandSDGs\\_fullreport\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/meetings/en/Contribution/DITC2019_TRACIT_IllicitTradeandSDGs_fullreport_en.pdf) and <https://www.tracit.org/event-dialogue-on-illicit-trade-and-the-sdgs.html>

<sup>iii</sup> United Nations Development Programme. Discussion Paper: The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control: An Accelerator for Sustainable Development. May 2017. Retrieved from <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/hiv-aids/the-who-framework-convention-on-tobacco-control-an-accelerator.html> (accessed 22 August 2019). World Health Organization. Tobacco and Poverty: A Vicious Circle. 2004. Retrieved from [https://www.who.int/tobacco/communications/events/wntd/2004/en/wntd2004\\_brochure\\_en.pdf?ua=1](https://www.who.int/tobacco/communications/events/wntd/2004/en/wntd2004_brochure_en.pdf?ua=1) (accessed 22 August 2019). World Bank. *Curbing the epidemic - governments and the economics of tobacco control (English)*. Development in practice. Washington DC ; World Bank, 1999.

<sup>iv</sup> UN Secretary General. Interoffice Memorandum to all Members of the UN System. Re: Non-Engagement with the Tobacco Industry. 20 August 2019.