

How the Tobacco Industry Exploited COVID-19 for Profit

COVID-19 has led to more than 5 million deaths and burdened health care systems and economies. Governments face a challenging road to recovery but the policy choices they make—such as implementing the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC)—can help respond to the pandemic and rebuild public health. However, the **Global Tobacco Industry Interference Index** revealed that **tobacco companies took advantage of the global crisis and many governments succumbed to industry interference**, ultimately compromising on life-saving policies.

Here are 3 ways governments were vulnerable to the industry's COVID tactics:



The tobacco industry uses Corporate Social Responsibility as a strategy to repair and build its public image, distracting from the harm it causes. During the pandemic, health ministries, hospitals and health workers around the world were targeted with pandemic-related CSR and many accepted.



In **Poland**, Philip Morris Polska donated medical equipment and PPE to hospitals.



When governments accept tobacco industry donations, it places them in vulnerable positions and can lead to policy compromises that benefit the industry's interests rather than those of public health.



In **Germany**, the health authority of Berlin accepted an offer from tobacco company PMI to use its cigarette factory as a COVID-19 logistics center.



The tobacco industry may have lobbied to get its products considered "essential" during the pandemic. Around the world, governments allowed the continued manufacturing and sale of tobacco.



In **Sudan, Malaysia** and **New York City** cigarettes were deemed essential commodities during a pandemic where smoking is a risk-factor.



New Zealand designated a tobacco factory as an "essential business" and permitted it to continue alongside medical and food services during the lockdown.



In **Iraq**, together with the free food ration program, poor families received donations of Somar cigarettes.

In a global pandemic, where smoking is a risk factor for severe COVID-19, the tobacco industry continued producing, distributing and selling its harmful products.

TAKE ACTION!



Preventing tobacco industry interference can support COVID-19 recovery efforts. Read the 2021 **#GlobalTobaccoIndex** to see how well governments implemented Article 5.3 of the WHO FCTC to protect policies from industry meddling.

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