

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS

30 April 2020

Secretary General António Guterres
UNITED NATIONS
New York, NY 10027

Dear Secretary General Guterres:

The tobacco control community stands with you in your commitment to [overcome the challenges of COVID-19](#) towards “a more sustainable, inclusive and equitable economy, guided by our shared promise—the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.” We applaud your initiative to provide the media with truthful science-based information, and to counter the global “misinfodemic” through the [United Nations Communications Response initiative](#). As advocates working to expose tobacco industry misinformation, it will be a privilege to contribute to this effort.

Now, more than ever is the time to encourage implementation of the global tobacco treaty, the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, as it is essential for advancing Goal 3 (Health) of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG Target 3.A, and plays a key role in achieving goals affecting hunger, poverty, environment, labor, gender, governance, and partnership. Like the SDGs, the WHO FCTC helps countries make progress towards numerous recognized human rights. A distinct feature of the WHO FCTC is the governments’ obligation to [protect public health policies](#) from the commercial and vested interests of the tobacco industry.

However, the tobacco industry and those furthering its interests are [exploiting the current pandemic](#) to camouflage the fact that its products kill up to half of its consumer; and that tobacco use is a major risk factor for non-communicable diseases (NCDs) which indicate a high risk for [developing severe](#) and even fatal COVID-19.

Consistent with the tobacco industry’s history of [undermining scientific evidence](#) and [deceiving the public](#), it has played a role in [health messages that sow confusion](#) and mislead the public. The tobacco industry, instead of undoing the spread of misinformation, is branding itself as part of the solution, and [maximizing visibility of its donations](#), thereby masking the estimated [USD 460 billion annual burden](#) to the global healthcare system.

Targeting nations in the global South, the tobacco industry has started to cash in on the goodwill gained by aggressively [lobbying to deem cigarettes as essential goods](#) despite lockdown restrictions and even sought tax privileges for its deadly products.

The tobacco industry’s products are [responsible for at least USD 1.4 trillion in economic losses annually](#). Implementation of the WHO FCTC produces both improved health and economic gains that could form part of “a [comprehensive response](#) to the devastating socioeconomic consequences” of COVID-19. For instance, tobacco taxes can reduce smoking, reduce the burden on health systems, and fund public health investment, while [healthcare cost recovery](#) mechanisms can improve health program as well as increase accountability of the tobacco industry. Tobacco-sourced financing that has been explored for health, development, and even for solidarity funds, may be tapped as the world recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The tobacco industry's manipulation of public perception during COVID-19 is creating a barrier to such health and economic solutions, making the vision of a healthy, just, and resilient world more elusive. It is in this light that **we urge you to include the tobacco industry misinformation in your efforts to battle the "misinfodemic."**

UN agencies are also vulnerable to the tobacco industry's efforts to gain undue credibility by seeking to [engage and associate with UN Offices](#), or with governments through the UN Offices, during the COVID-19 crisis. ECOSOC [resolution \(E/2017/L.21\)](#) which acknowledges the importance of the ***Model policy for agencies of the United Nations system on preventing tobacco industry interference*** was designed to prevent the tobacco industry from doing so and has never been more important.

We look forward to supporting you in this endeavor. You may reach us through Ms. Bungon Ritthiphakdee (bungon@ggtc.world), Executive Director of the Global Center for Good Governance in Tobacco Control (GGTC), a partner in STOP (Stopping Tobacco Organizations and Products).

Signed

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2. **Alan Maryon-Davis**, Honorary Professor of Public Health, Faculty of Life Sciences and Medicine, Kings College London, United Kingdom
3. **Amanda Amos**, Convenor, Group for Research on Inequalities and Tobacco Control, University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom
4. **ASH Finland**, Mervi Hara, Executive Director, Finland
5. **Asian Consultancy on Tobacco Control**, Judith Mackay, Hong Kong, China
6. **Association of European Cancer Leagues (ECL)**, Wendy Yared, Director, Belgium
7. **Australian Health Promotion Association**, Gemma Crawford, President, Australia
8. **Austrian Council on Smoking and Health**, Dr. Kurt Aigner, FCCP em, President, Austria
9. **Balajee Sewa Sansthan**, Awadhesh Kumar, Executive Director, India
10. **BlueLink Foundation**, Pavel Antonov, PhD, Executive Editor/Co-founder, Bulgaria
11. **Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids**, Matthew L. Myers, President, United States
12. **Centre for Combating Tobacco, University of Colombo**, Mahesh Rajasuriya, MD, Director, Sri Lanka
13. **Corporate Accountability**, Michél Legendre, Associate Campaign Director, United States
14. **David Thomas**, Professor and Head of Tobacco Control Research, Menzies School of Health Research, Australia
15. **Framework Convention Alliance (FCA)**, Francis Thompson, Executive Director, Canada
16. **Global Center for Good Governance in Tobacco Control (GGTC)**, a partner in STOP, Nuntavarn Vichit-Vadakan, Chair, Thailand
17. **Healis Sekhsaria Institute of Public Health**, Mira B. Aghi, PhD, Consultant, India
18. **HealthJustice**, Jacky Sarita, Managing Director, Philippines
19. **Indonesian Public Health Association (IAKMI)**, Dr. Ede Surya Darmawan, President, Indonesia
20. **Life, Advocacy Center**, Lilia Olefir, Executive Director, Ukraine
21. **Laura Rosen**, Professor, Tel Aviv University, Israel
22. **Malaysian Council for Tobacco Control**, Prof. Datuk Dr. Lekhraj Rampal, President, Malaysia

23. **Malaysian Medical Association**, Rissa Soetama, COO, Malaysia
24. **Melissa Mialon**, Honorary Research Fellow, School of Public Health, University of São Paulo, Brazil
25. **MyWATCH, Malaysia Women Action for Tobacco Control and Health**, Roslizawati Md Ali, President, Malaysia
26. **NCD Alliance**, Katie Dain, Chief Executive Officer, United Kingdom
27. **Nofumadores.org (non-smokers.org)**, Raquel Fernandez Megina, President, Spain
28. **Norbert Hirschhorn, MD**, Tobacco Industry watcher, pro bono, United Kingdom
29. **Norwegian Cancer Society**, Nonguebzanga Maxime Compaore, Special Adviser, International Affairs, Norway
30. **Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant Institute of Studies in Rural Development**, Dr. Shiv Pujan Pandey, Director, India
31. **Prabath Hewasundara**, Faculty of Science, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka
32. **PROGGA**, ABM Zubair, Executive Director, Bangladesh
33. **Rob Moodie**, Professor of Public Health, University of Melbourne, Australia
34. **Ruth E. Malone**, Professor Emerita (Recalled), School of Nursing, University of California, San Francisco, United States
35. **Silvana Rubano Turci**, Coordinator, Observatory of the Strategies of the Tobacco Industry of the Tobacco and Health Studies Center, Oswaldo Cruz Foundation, Brazil
36. **Simon Capewell**, Professor of Clinical Epidemiology, University of Liverpool - Department of Public Health & Policy / Institute of Psychology, Health & Society, United Kingdom
37. **Simon Chapman**, Emeritus Professor, University of Sydney - School of Public Health, Australia
38. **Smoke-Free Israel**, Shira Kislev, CEO, Israel
39. **Smoke-Free Life Coalition**, Gergana Geshanova, Chair of the Board, Bulgaria
40. **Smoke-Free Bulgaria Association**, Masha Gavrailova, Chair of the Board, Bulgaria
41. **Smoke Free Partnership**, Anca Toma Friedlaender, Director, Belgium
42. **Southeast Asia Tobacco Control Alliance**, Ulysess Dorotheo, Director, Philippines
43. **Stanton A. Glantz**, Professor of Medicine and Director, University of California San Francisco - Center for Tobacco Control Research and Education, United States
44. **Stephan Lewandowsky**, Professor, School of Psychological Science and Cabot Institute, University of Bristol, United Kingdom
45. **Tanzania Tobacco Control Forum**, Lutgard Kokulinda Kagaruki , Executive Director, Tanzania
46. **The International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease**, a partner in STOP, Gan Quan, Director of Tobacco Control, United States
47. **Tobacco - Free Association of Zambia**, Brenda Chitindi, Executive Director, Zambia
48. **Tobacco Control Research Group**, University of Bath, a partner in STOP, Anna Gilmore, Professor of Public Health, Director, United Kingdom
49. **Tobacco-Free Advocacy Japan (TFAJ)**, Jun Sono, MD, Chairman, Japan
50. **Vital Strategies**, a partner in STOP, Sandra Mullin, Senior Vice President, United States
51. **World Heart Federation**, Eduardo Bianco (Chair, Tobacco Expert Group), Florence Berteletti (Advocacy Director), Switzerland



STOPPING TOBACCO ORGANIZATIONS & PRODUCTS



Global Center for Good Governance in Tobacco Control



International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease
Health solutions for the poor



Asian Consultancy on Tobacco Control

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