



A GLOBAL  
TOBACCO  
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WATCHDOG

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Brief



Global



# Tobacco Industry Efforts to Influence Policy and Debate Among United Nations Audiences, Including at the United Nations General Assembly

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**For more than two decades, a growing number of United Nations (UN) agencies have rejected partnerships and interactions with the tobacco industry, recognizing that the industry's commercial interests are fundamentally incompatible<sup>1</sup> with health and development objectives.**

Parties to the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC),<sup>2</sup> a global health treaty, have committed to keep the industry out of policymaking. The Secretary-General of the United Nations (UNSG) has urged UN agencies to adopt the Model Policy for Agencies of the United Nations System on Preventing Tobacco Industry Interference<sup>3</sup> (Model Policy), which embodies a similar objective for the UN system. Yet as illustrated in this brief, the industry continues to seek and find ways of accessing UN audiences and policy discussions in spite of these measures—suggesting these efforts need to be strengthened across the UN system.

This brief aims to help government and UN officials as well as tobacco control advocates identify and take steps to avoid industry influence around UN organizations and events. It is an update to a 2019 STOP brief<sup>4</sup> on this issue, in anticipation of tobacco industry attempts to engage government and UN officials at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). It also describes the tobacco industry's interest in several issues to be discussed during the 77<sup>th</sup> Session of the UNGA (UNGA77),<sup>5</sup> including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), youth, development in Africa and sustainable finance.

## **THE RATIONALE FOR EXCLUDING THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY FROM UN EVENTS AND PROCESSES**

### **Undermining Sustainable Development**

The tobacco industry's products are linked to more than 8 million deaths every year,<sup>6</sup> trillions of dollars in annual economic costs,<sup>7</sup> poverty,<sup>8</sup> child labor<sup>9</sup> and environmental harm.<sup>10</sup> The tobacco industry's actions gravely hinder progress<sup>11</sup> toward accomplishing the SDGs, which include strengthening implementation of the WHO FCTC, while tobacco control measures designed to reduce tobacco use, typically opposed by the industry, can facilitate progress towards the Global Goals.<sup>12</sup>

### **Violation of Human Rights**

Human rights experts have declared, based on an assessment of cigarette giant Philip Morris International (PMI), that a company manufacturing and selling tobacco products cannot comply with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPR).<sup>13</sup> This is why tobacco, alongside weapons, are among the most excluded products in ethical investment portfolios<sup>14</sup> and many of the signatories of the UNGPR shun tobacco.<sup>15</sup>

### **Global Treaties and Practice**

The WHO FCTC, the global health treaty, effectively identifies the tobacco industry as a barrier to public health, stating that efforts should be made to protect policy from the industry and other vested interests. This is formalized in Article 5.3 of the treaty, with Guidelines for the Implementation of Article 5.3<sup>16</sup> including a recommendation to reject any contribution, partnership or engagement offered by the tobacco industry and to prevent giving the tobacco industry any form of incentive to run its business. It obliges governments to limit interactions with the tobacco industry, while the treaty's governing body requires participants to declare tobacco industry interests.<sup>17</sup> These protective measures are taken in recognition

of the industry's ongoing efforts to meddle in, delay and derail health policy.

WHO's policy of non-engagement with the tobacco industry led it to reject<sup>18</sup> an application from pharmaceutical company Medicago, which is part-owned by PMI, for its COVID vaccine to be considered for the COVAX scheme.

By 2017, the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) had adopted a Model Policy for Agencies of the United Nations System on Preventing Tobacco Industry Interference,<sup>19</sup> that incorporates key provisions from the WHO FCTC Article 5.3 Guidelines. In 2019, the UNSG circulated a reminder to all UN offices to adopt the Model Policy, to ensure that all UN officials would reject tobacco industry engagements and partnerships.<sup>20</sup>

Other UN organizations have moved to explicitly reject tobacco companies. For example, after initially permitting tobacco companies to participate, the UN Global Compact (UNGC) delisted them as members in 2017.<sup>21</sup>

In the private sector, investors representing over US \$16 trillion in assets<sup>22</sup> under management have excluded tobacco from their investment portfolios. Notably, the UN Principles for Responsible Investment (UNPRI), in defining a "responsible investor," sets tobacco as an example for negative screening or as part of the exclusionary list.<sup>23</sup>

## **KEY CONCERNS ABOUT THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY IN RELATION TO THE UNGA77 AGENDA**

Despite global rules and practices, it appears that the tobacco industry still attempts to find ways to access and influence UN organizations and audiences, suggesting that efforts to exclude the industry need to be strengthened. Targeting the UN system may be part of the tobacco industry's public relations strategy to launder its tarnished

image, distract from its negative impacts on SDG progress and try to gain legitimacy as a partner in health and development.

These are some of the key concerns at UNGA77<sup>24</sup>:

### 1. Targeting Youth

Under agenda item 65, UNGA77 will discuss human rights, including the rights of the child, referring to a Resolution adopted by the General Assembly in December 2007<sup>25</sup> that specifies the need to prevent addictions, including tobacco, among youth. UNGA77 also includes a High Level Meeting on education<sup>26</sup> and addressing inequities that have worsened during the COVID pandemic. **Any attempts by the tobacco industry and its allies to participate or intervene in these events or discussions must be rejected.**

The tobacco companies are known to target youth, to help recruit new customers to replace those who quit or die; cigarettes kill up to two-thirds of long-term users.<sup>27</sup> They aggressively market new addictive products, including to youth<sup>28</sup> via music<sup>29</sup> and sports sponsorships,<sup>30</sup> while continuing to profit from cigarette sales. In response, youth groups have called for intergenerational solidarity<sup>31</sup> to hold the tobacco industry accountable and liable for its continuous acts of harming people and the planet.

The tobacco industry tries to distract from this harm by positioning itself as part of the solution. In many countries tobacco companies sponsor schools, other educational establishments and programs, and scholarship schemes.<sup>32</sup> Some tobacco companies use examples of this activity, sometimes undertaken by front groups, in their environmental, social, and corporate governance (ESG) reporting. This helps promote a positive image of the tobacco

industry to youth,<sup>33</sup> which could convert to favoring its products. In some tobacco growing communities, it may help distract from the industry's role in the use of child labor in tobacco cultivation, which can interfere with children's access to education.<sup>34</sup>

### 2. Targeting Africa

Under agenda item 63, UNGA77 will discuss efforts to promote sustainable development in Africa. The African Union, among others, has identified tobacco as a barrier to development goals.<sup>35</sup> **The tobacco industry has no place in discussions around sustainable development in Africa.**

While the industry presents itself as a partner for economic growth and development in Africa, it has been found to employ underhand and possibly even illegal tactics on the continent.<sup>36</sup> In pursuit of new customers, tobacco companies have set their sights on Africa, which has comparatively low rates of tobacco use, young populations with growing disposable income and (in some countries) a lack of tobacco control laws to stem the industry's efforts to increase sales. There are signs the industry is succeeding: Analysis for the latest edition of the Tobacco Atlas<sup>37</sup> found that against a global tide of reduced smoking rates, 10 countries in Africa have seen adult smoking rates increase—potentially hindering efforts to achieve SGD 3 targets around reducing preventable disease and death.

### 3. Influencing Sustainable Financing Discussions

Under agenda item 17, UNGA77 will discuss financing for development. This can include domestic resource mobilization,<sup>38,39</sup> private sector contributions to national and global public goods,<sup>40</sup> and solidarity taxes and minimum corporate taxes.<sup>41</sup> Curbing tax evasion and illicit financial flows also have a role to play.<sup>42</sup> There is a clear conflict of interest between

the tobacco industry and efforts to promote development financing of the SDGs and pandemic recovery. The tobacco industry consistently lobbies governments to keep tobacco taxes low and has also been found to be complicit in the illicit tobacco trade.<sup>43</sup> The industry is referred to as the single greatest challenge for any government<sup>44</sup> attempting to implement tobacco control measures, including increasing tobacco taxes that can contribute to sustainable development in terms of improved health and sustainable financing for development.

Developmental financing studies, including for global health and the pandemic, point to the opportunity and need to increase tobacco taxes. The 2015 Addis Ababa Action Agenda<sup>45</sup> endorsed tobacco tax increases as a key strategy to reduce both the global burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and help finance sustainable development initiatives. This followed a WHO proposal for a Solidarity Tobacco Contribution<sup>46</sup> to fund global public goods like education, the environment and global health, while global leaders recommended tobacco taxes as an ideal sustainable source<sup>47</sup> of development financing. The rationale is clear: 90% of countries already implement taxes on tobacco in some form so the mechanism is already in place, and it can help smokers quit and prevent youth uptake (benefiting health) as well as generating revenue.

Estimates show that a small increase in tobacco taxes could generate approximately US \$10.8 billion for global health.<sup>48</sup> According to WHO FCTC Article 6 Guidelines,<sup>49</sup> tobacco excise taxes should account for at least 70% of the retail price for tobacco products, but the vast majority of countries have yet to reach this level of taxation. Increasing taxes on tobacco products is also a means of recouping the

economic burden of tobacco use, estimated at US \$2.1 trillion annually (Deutsche Asset Management estimates this figure is at least five times more than tobacco's estimated economic "benefits").<sup>50</sup> Another means of recouping tobacco-related economic losses<sup>51</sup> is by curbing cigarette smuggling, which deprives governments of tax revenue. Notably, tobacco companies have been found to be complicit in illicit trade,<sup>52</sup> reportedly through corruption,<sup>53</sup> which fuels illicit financial flows.

The tobacco industry often uses financial contributions including political or charitable donations or grants to think-tanks to facilitate its opposition to tobacco taxes.<sup>54</sup> It also negotiates with governments as to the amount of taxes it wants to pay.<sup>55</sup> Such contributions may obscure the fact that the tobacco industry should pay<sup>56</sup> for the harms it causes in compensation, taxes or penalties. The tobacco industry's greenwashing activities<sup>57</sup> and public relations campaigns<sup>58</sup> including pandemic donations,<sup>59</sup> should not be endorsed or condoned as this may assist the tobacco industry in its efforts to delay or block progress on health and sustainable financing for development.

## **THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY'S USE OF ALLIES AND FRONT GROUPS**

### **1. New Approaches to Tobacco Harm Reduction Conference**

A new development in 2022 is a side event, New Approaches to Tobacco Control,<sup>60</sup> that has been arranged alongside UNGA. While information for this event does not explicitly say it is targeted at UN audiences, its venue and timing (in New York City, during UNGA77) and a message in the "About" section of the event's website stating it aims "to bring tobacco harm reduction to the international policy stage," suggest that the organizers

are aiming to reach UN and national officials attending UNGA. While some sponsors are listed, the identity of the organizer is not disclosed. However, a number of speakers are former executives or consultants for PMI. The co-chair is the founder and former President of the PMI-funded Foundation for a Smoke-Free World (FSFW). While FSFW says that it is independent of its funder, analysis of its tax returns identifies how FSFW's activities and messaging align with PMI's interests.<sup>61</sup>

## 2. Concordia

Typically, when tobacco companies cannot gain access to the main program of UN events, they secure access to a similar audience by arranging, sponsoring and speaking at side events.

PMI, the world's largest publicly listed tobacco company, is a "Patron Member" of Concordia,<sup>62</sup> an organization that describes itself as a "nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that facilitates meaningful partnerships for positive social impact." Critically, Concordia organizes an influential annual side event at UNGA that brings together speakers from business, government and the UN system, in addition to organizing regional meetings throughout the year. PMI uses this platform to access and position its executives alongside UN and government officials from around the world,<sup>63</sup> potentially creating the perception of alignment and partnership. For example, at the last UNGA in 2021, PMI's CEO addressed the audience<sup>64</sup> immediately after speakers from the UNGC and UN Foundation; another PMI executive spoke in the same session as Zimbabwe's Minister of Finance.

PMI's sponsorship and membership of Concordia has provided it with brand exposure and opportunities for PMI executives to participate in these events since at least 2017.

Concordia Americas meetings in 2022<sup>65</sup> have given PMI executives access to policymakers from across the region and the speaker list for Concordia's 2022 Annual Summit<sup>66</sup> confirms the continuation of this arrangement, in spite of efforts by STOP in 2021 to draw attention to the conflicts it creates.

On several occasions, STOP alerted<sup>67</sup> UN delegates to PMI's sponsorship of Concordia and the company's participation in the Concordia Summit (Annex I). The UNSG has urged UN agencies to adopt the Model Policy. It is therefore problematic that high-level officials of the UN attend events that benefit from tobacco industry sponsorship and feature speakers from PMI or any other tobacco company.

PMI's participation in Concordia meetings may help it distract from the fact that it continues to manufacture and sell deadly, addictive products, while it attempts to reposition itself as a leader and partner in innovation.<sup>68</sup> While STOP supports the UNSG's call for the private sector to play an increased role in UN innovation, including funding via the UN Innovation Network,<sup>69</sup> the UN must also take deliberate measures to exclude tobacco industry-funded research and innovation projects.

## 3. Eliminating Child Labour in Tobacco Growing Foundation

The tobacco industry uses third party entities as a front when tobacco companies are expressly excluded. Private sector participation has long been endorsed through the UNGC,<sup>70</sup> particularly by encouraging businesses to align with the business and human rights agenda,<sup>71, 72</sup> including through sustainable investments<sup>73</sup> consistent with the UN Principles for Responsible Investing (UNPRI).<sup>74</sup> When UNGC excluded tobacco companies in

2017, the Eliminating Child Labour in Tobacco Growing Foundation (ECLT), an association of tobacco companies<sup>75</sup> with tobacco executives on its board, managed to retain its seat. Transnational tobacco companies such as PMI and British American Tobacco (BAT) include the ECLT's activities in their own environmental, social and governance (ESG) reporting. STOP led an open letter highlighting this tactic, calling on UNGC to exclude ECLT (Annex II).

The International Labour Organization (ILO) also fell prey to this tobacco industry tactic. While ILO took efforts to end partnerships and grants that involved the tobacco industry,<sup>76</sup> ECLT managed to include a quote from ILO Director General Guy Sander in its 2020 annual report<sup>77</sup> and listed an ILO executive as its "ILO designated technical advisor." Its 2021-2022 Annual Report lists ILO as a partner, while the 5<sup>th</sup> Global Conference on the Elimination of Child Labour<sup>78</sup> in May 2022, co-organized and co-hosted by ILO, included a speaker from Japan Tobacco International (JTI).<sup>79</sup> The tobacco company's contributions were amplified on social media by ECLT. According to ECLT's most recent Annual Report,<sup>80</sup> a JTI executive took over as President of ECLT's board in July.

#### 4. Medicago and others

By acquiring<sup>81</sup> medical and pharmaceutical companies like Vectura, a manufacturer of medical inhalers for tobacco-induced diseases; OtiTopic, a specialist in inhaled medicines; and Medicago, a vaccine producer, PMI claims to be transforming into a wellness company.<sup>82</sup> These tactics have caused public outrage as they lead to conflicts of interest: With Vectura and OtiTopic, PMI has an incentive to profit twice, from selling both products that cause tobacco-related diseases and products that treat some of those conditions. With Medicago, PMI can associate itself with the fight against

COVID-19, while research suggests its main product, cigarettes, increases the risk of contracting COVID-19, even if vaccinated, and worsens outcomes among people with COVID-19. Notably, PMI has funded research and awarded grants to scientific bodies that may have misinformed the public about the links between COVID-19 and tobacco use, potentially adding to the colossal burden of tobacco-induced harms.<sup>83</sup>

In March 2022, WHO rejected<sup>84</sup> Medicago's application for its vaccine to be considered for the COVAX scheme due to its links to PMI. All government and UN officials should be similarly wary of tobacco-backed or funded entities. The tobacco industry has no place in UN discussions about improving global health.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Speaking in August 2022, the UNSG warned<sup>85</sup> that "the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals have been thrown further off course." This provides an impetus for more than 180 Parties to the WHO FCTC to attain progress towards the SDGs through tobacco control. This requires removing the single greatest barrier to that progress: tobacco industry interference at both the national and global level.

The tobacco industry causes health, societal, economic and environmental harm and has no business participating in the UN system. Further, it should not benefit from appearing to be aligned with UN priorities and executives while remaining a barrier to UN goals. Gaining access to UN agencies and projects may help the tobacco industry to influence debate within the UN system and encourage national governments to partner with the industry, in contravention of the WHO FCTC. It may also guide discussions in the UN system away from actions that would help reduce tobacco use, limit the industry's influence and hold the industry

accountable for harms such as damage to health and the environment and child labor in its supply chain.

Through its front groups and allies, the tobacco industry has bought a platform and the access it needs to promote its own narrative during a major UN event, potentially distracting attention from important solutions for issues including sustainable financing, youth development and development in Africa.

Government delegations and UN officials must do better to protect health and advance the Global Goals by doing the following:

- Reject and denounce all forms of tobacco industry partnerships, including sponsorship, participation and partnerships with industry front groups, and refuse to attend industry-sponsored events, or events that provide a platform for the industry.
- Promote full implementation of the WHO FCTC and increasing tobacco taxes as integral parts of national plans to achieve the Global Goals.
- Ask governments and UN agencies to do more to protect youth from the tobacco industry by encouraging the implementation of tobacco taxes and comprehensive bans on tobacco advertising, promotions and sponsorships, for example.
- Encourage governments to hold the tobacco industry accountable for its health and environmental harms.

For the UN System, an improved policy and due diligence process consistent with the UN Model Policy, endorsed by ECOSOC, is essential. These measures, coupled with the above recommendations, may help to safeguard UN priorities from further tobacco industry interference in the future.

The tobacco industry undermines UN policies against tobacco, including using the UN likeness and name to create a misleading impression of contributing to sustainable development while working to escape liability for harms caused to humanity, including child labor, and to the planet.

**Extract from civil society letter to the leadership of the UN Global Compact**

**These Annexes detail efforts undertaken by STOP in 2021, mentioned in the text above, to highlight and call for action to address tobacco industry influence on UN bodies and audiences.**

### **[ANNEX I: Open Letter From STOP to Government and UN Delegates Attending the UN General Assembly](#)**

September 21, 2021

Open Letter From STOP to Government and UN Delegates Attending the UN General Assembly  
**Reject tobacco participation in UNGA Side Events, such as the Concordia Summit.**

The tobacco industry is a [barrier to achieving the Global Goals](#). Its products harm the environment and kill more than eight million people every year. Yet, tobacco companies and their allies are trying to posture with UN and global leaders by hosting or participating at side events during the UN General Assembly (UNGA). Such events are helping them gain the appearance of credibility and obscure the extent of the harm caused by their products.

For example, cigarette giant Philip Morris International (PMI), a sponsor of Concordia, is listed as having [two speakers on the same program](#) with the UN Secretary General, UNICEF and other government dignitaries at the Concordia Summit. In 2018, the WHO Director General had to pull out of the same event after discovering that it was sponsored by PMI, a fact that Concordia did not reveal until shortly before the event. In 2019, [we published a warning ahead of time](#).

Concordia, despite receiving repeated expressions of concern over its links to the tobacco giant, continues to provide PMI with a platform. This allows PMI to spread messaging that [appears to undermine trust in established science and health authorities](#). That is clearly in the commercial interests of PMI, not health.

PMI alone still produces more than 600 billion cigarettes every year and it may now be incentivized to increase harms its products cause. Despite calls from concerned patients and alarm from medical societies, health experts and ethical investors,

PMI [recently acquired](#) pharmaceutical companies whose products treat [lung](#) and [heart](#) conditions. PMI now stands to profit twice over—from selling the treatment, as well as the cause, of diseases which may be tobacco-related.

Those joining an event that includes participation from PMI are potentially complicit in helping the tobacco industry further its commercial interests at the expense of public health and the global goals. Any perceived endorsement by UN agencies and political leaders may help the tobacco industry secure access to national and local policymakers, potentially in violation of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC Article 5.3).

The tobacco industry's internal documents show that such access to international organizations is [part of a strategy to establish credibility and legitimacy](#), and [help it market new products](#) that investigative reporting has suggested are [targeted at young people](#). [Over 65 countries ban all forms of tobacco sponsorship](#) such as the Concordia partnership—and any tobacco sponsorship promoted online potentially violates these bans.

Civil society has consistently denounced the tobacco industry's use of side events and participation during global events from which it is otherwise barred (the [World Economic Forum is another example](#)) to gain access and be seen alongside global leaders. Earlier this year, when Philip Morris sponsored Nikkei's Future of Asia conference and secured a its CEO as a speaker, heads of state responded to civil society's alerts by withdrawing from the event. Philip Morris' sponsorship and speaker [were eventually withdrawn](#). We call on all UN agencies and policymakers to refuse participation at such events and act according to the mandates of the WHO FCTC. Doing so would avoid furthering the public relations interests of the tobacco industry and be a step toward achievement of the global goals.



## **ANNEX II: Letter to the United Nations Global Compact: Remove ECLT as a Participant**

April 30, 2021  
Ms. SANDA OJIAMBO  
CEO & Executive Director  
UNITED NATIONS GLOBAL COMPACT  
New York, NY 10017

### **Dear Ms. Ojiambo,**

We, the undersigned civil society representatives, request that the [Eliminating Child Labour in Tobacco-Growing Foundation](#) (ECLT) be removed as a participant to the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC), in accordance with UN policies, including UNGC's 2017 policy update,<sup>[i]</sup> the Model Policy for Agencies of the United Nations System on Preventing Tobacco Industry Interference (Model Policy),<sup>[ii]</sup> and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs), which embody the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC).<sup>[iii]</sup> ECLT has undeniable ties with the tobacco industry and has failed in its stated objective of ending child labor in tobacco—a problem directly linked to the exploitative business practices of its funders and members.

- **ECLT is a corporate alliance of tobacco producers and manufacturers.** British American Tobacco (BAT), Philip Morris International (PMI), Imperial Tobacco (Imperial) and Japan Tobacco International (JTI) are members, along with leaf suppliers and the International Tobacco Growers Association (ITGA),<sup>[iv]</sup> and are represented on its governing board.<sup>[v]</sup> Notably, ITGA itself is also funded and directed by tobacco companies.<sup>[vi]</sup> Evidence recently provided to UNGC by OxySuisse further confirms that ECLT was established to advance tobacco industry interests.
- **ECLT is promoted by tobacco companies in their public relations activities as evidence of their corporate social responsibility (CSR), aiming to “gain political support and weaken opposition.”**<sup>[vii]</sup> PMI,<sup>[viii]</sup> BAT<sup>[ix]</sup>, <sup>[x]</sup>, JTI,<sup>[xi]</sup> and

Imperial<sup>[xii]</sup>, <sup>[xiii]</sup>, <sup>[xiv]</sup>, <sup>[xv]</sup> cite ECLT as evidence of compliance with standards in human rights or sustainability in their environmental, social and corporate governance (ESG) reporting; BAT highlighted ECLT's provision of loans and engagement of policymakers in its 2020 ESG report, even while an ongoing legal suit filed against the company alleges that it continues to profit from child labor.<sup>[xvi]</sup>

- **Other UN agencies have declined or ended partnerships with ECLT.** For example, following an open letter from over 100 civil society organizations,<sup>[xvii]</sup> the International Labour Organization (ILO) terminated its funding partnership with ECLT in 2018 to avoid hindering State Parties' achievement of the WHO FCTC and to ensure coherence with policies of the UN System, particularly the Model Policy adopted by the UN Economic and Social Council (and State Parties).<sup>[xviii]</sup>, <sup>[xix]</sup>
- **ECLT is an integral part of tobacco companies' so-called CSR, which itself is problematic:**
  - **CSR is banned in many countries.** Article 13 of the WHO FCTC mandates that governments adopt a comprehensive ban on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship (TAPS) including activities described as socially responsible. Article 5.3 of the WHO FCTC requires governments to protect their public health policies from tobacco industry interests, including rejecting and denormalizing the industry's so-called CSR activities that are used as a means to access policymakers<sup>[xx]</sup> for the purpose of weakening tobacco control legislation and subverting WHO FCTC implementation. Over 180 Parties are bound by the WHO FCTC and 63 countries have a comprehensive ban on TAPS.
  - **It diverts attention from tobacco companies' violations of human and workers' rights.** According to a union of tobacco workers in its letter to the ILO,<sup>[xxi]</sup> ECLT serves to detract from important issues behind child labor: poverty perpetuated by the very tobacco companies that fund ECLT, unfair contracting

schemes and denial of rights to organize and enter into collective bargaining agreements, among others.

- **It detracts from tobacco companies' liability for profiting from child labor.** The tobacco companies behind ECLT, the ultimate buyers of tobacco leaves, are primarily responsible for child labor and should be held liable for the consequences. A lawsuit has been filed against the main founder of ECLT, BAT,<sup>[xxii]</sup> seeking compensation for “widespread use of unlawful child labour... and the systematic exposure... to extremely hazardous working conditions with minimal protection against industrial accidents, injuries and diseases.”<sup>[xxiii]</sup> Studies show that in Malawi alone, the tobacco industry enjoyed substantial economic benefit from unpaid child labor, of up to 20 times the total budget of ECLT.<sup>[xxiv]</sup>
- **It is a smokescreen for tobacco companies' strategies to evade responsibility.** In appearing to address child labor, tobacco companies distract from their creation of legal structures to shift the burden to third parties—distancing themselves from the problem to evade culpability.<sup>[xxv]</sup>, <sup>[xxvi]</sup> Instead of paying a nominal amount for ECLT to implement inadequate and ineffective programs, the companies should pay fair prices<sup>[xxvii]</sup> that could ultimately pull farmers out of poverty and consequently prevent practices of child labor.

**Stop ECLT and the tobacco industry from exploiting UNGC and the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour.**

ECLT is an alliance of tobacco companies that is governed and used by those companies to give the appearance of complying with the Guiding Principles on Human Rights and the UN Principles of Responsible Investment (ESG), and of fulfilling commitments toward the UN declaration of 2021 as the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour. In reality, the tobacco industry's interests are irreconcilable with the interests of human rights and sustainable development<sup>[xxviii]</sup> and are antithetical to UNGC's mission.<sup>[xxix]</sup>

The tobacco industry undermines UN policies against tobacco, including using the UN likeness and name to create a misleading impression of contributing to sustainable development<sup>[xxx]</sup> while working to escape liability for harms caused to humanity, including child labor, and to the planet. Allowing ECLT to be a part of UNGC legitimizes the tobacco industry's tactics, which hinder achievement of the WHO FCTC and UN SDGs.<sup>[xxxi]</sup>

**We urge UNGC to act according to its mandate, practice good governance and align its policies with those of UN agencies, international bodies and member states that accord with WHO FCTC Article 5.3 and work to protect policy, health and development objectives by rejecting partnerships and interactions with the tobacco industry and its allies.<sup>[xxxii]</sup> End ECLT's participation in UNGC.**

Should you have any questions or wish to discuss this issue further, please [contact us](#).

## Endnotes

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### **About STOP (Stopping Tobacco Organizations and Products)**

STOP 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 comprised of a partnership among the Tobacco Control Research Group (TCRG) at the University of Bath, The Global Center for Good Governance in Tobacco Control (GGTC), the International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease (The Union) and Vital Strategies. For more information, visit [exposetobacco.org](http://exposetobacco.org).