



CS/HS/21/110

Key note for the launch of the Africa Tobacco Industry Interference Index

Head of the Secretariat of WHO FCTC

27 October 2021 / 13:00 pm (Geneva time) Virtual

Thank you, moderator.

Honourable Minister / Honourable Ministerial Representative

Esteemed colleagues and valued partners.

It is a great pleasure to be here today for the virtual launch of the Africa Tobacco Industry Interference Index 2021.

The Africa Tobacco Industry Interference Index reveals evidence of the furtive activities of the tobacco industry and sheds light on the actions taken by the governments of 14 countries in the WHO African region to protect their tobacco control policies from the interests of the tobacco industry and its allies.

The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) recognizes in its preamble *the need to be alert to any efforts by the tobacco industry to undermine or subvert tobacco control efforts and the need to be informed of activities of the tobacco industry that have a negative impact on tobacco control efforts.*

This is further strengthened by the obligation in Article 5.3 of the Convention for Parties to protect their public health policies from the tobacco industry, and the Guidelines for Implementation, in which the first principle underscores the fundamental and irreconcilable conflict between tobacco industry interests and public health interests.

Since the entry into force of the WHO FCTC in 2005, several studies, as well as the information provided by Parties during reporting cycles, have shown that tobacco industry interference has been the major obstacle to comprehensive implementation of the treaty.

In their efforts to shift their focus from developed countries with stronger regulatory policies to low and middle income countries with a weaker regulatory framework, the tobacco industry and its allies have never relented in their efforts to circumvent policies aimed at protecting public health and saving lives.

This has also been apparent during the current COVID-19 pandemic.

We have seen how the tobacco industry has created a narrative in which it has positioned itself as part of the solution through corporate social responsibility. However, the irreconcilable difference between tobacco industry's interests and public health interests completely erases them from being part of the solution as they claim.

Instead, they are the problem.

Evidence has shown that smokers have up to a 50 percent greater risk of developing severe disease or dying from COVID-19 than nonsmokers.

Mindful of the challenges faced by Parties from the African region to deal with industry interference, the Convention Secretariat assisted in the establishment of the Africa Centre for Tobacco Industry Monitoring and Policy Research, a tobacco industry observatory hosted by the Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University in South Africa. We are pleased to see that the observatory is collaborating with the African Tobacco Control Alliance (ATCA) to spearhead regional efforts to monitor and counter industry interference.

Despite numerous difficulties faced by several countries from the WHO African Region, we are glad to see that the tobacco industry interference index reveals how some countries have stood firm in upholding their obligations under Article 5.3 of the WHO FCTC.

We hail the efforts of the governments of Gabon, Kenya and Uganda for their remarkable efforts to take on tobacco industry interference and keep their tobacco control policies free from interference. Congratulations for the progress made as we see from this year's tobacco industry interference index.

I would also like to use this opportunity to encourage Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia to maintain the current momentum for tobacco control and continue to take positive steps toward the finalization and adoption of comprehensive tobacco control laws in their countries.

Rest assured that the Convention Secretariat stands firm to support you in these efforts – including through the FCTC 2030 project - and to ensure that these laws are fully compliant with the WHO FCTC and its guidelines for implementation, and perhaps most importantly, free from the interference of the tobacco industry.

I would also like to call on all countries highlighted in this report to take further steps to establish strong measures to limit interactions of public officials with the tobacco industry and to ensure the transparency of those interactions, in the event that they do occur.

An example of such measures could be – as some countries have done – the implementation of recommendations from the Article 5.3 Guidelines, such as the *formulation, adoption and implementation of a code of conduct for public officials, prescribing the standards with which they should comply in their dealings with the tobacco industry.*

Before I conclude, permit me to congratulate the African Tobacco Control Alliance and the Africa Centre for Tobacco Industry Monitoring and Policy Research for developing this

important report. Your contribution in supporting Parties to implement the WHO FCTC and its Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products are well recognized and appreciated.

Congratulations again to the Parties from the WHO African region for their tireless efforts towards a tobacco-free Africa.

I look forward to seeing you again virtually at the Ninth Session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention and the Second Session of the Meeting of the Parties to the protocol in November as we continue to map our way towards a sustainable, healthier future.

Thank you.