



STATEMENT OF SUPPORT FROM ADVOCATES

April 8, 2022

To: Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General, World Health Organisation (WHO)

cc. Dr Mariangela Batista Galvão Simão, Assistant Director-General for drug access, vaccines and pharmaceuticals, World Health Organisation (WHO)

We applaud WHO's commitment to the [WHO Framework of Engagement with Non-State Actors \(FENSA\)](#) which embodies the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control's (WHO FCTC) policy of protecting public health from the commercial and vested interests of the tobacco industry. This commitment is also consistent with Article 5.3 of the WHO FCTC which requires parties to reject partnerships and collaborations with tobacco companies. We support WHO's decision to put on hold Medicago's (Medicago Inc.) request for prequalification for emergency distribution of Covifenz, in light of the significant ownership by Philip Morris International (PMI).¹

WHO has confirmed that it made this decision due to the conflict of interest arising from Medicago's ties with PMI.² To uphold the integrity of the WHO FCTC and the WHO FENSA, it is imperative that Medicago Inc. divests its tobacco interests. In a July 2020 press statement, Medicago already revealed that one of its co-owners, PMI, was open to assessing better-suited investors,³ but it has not done so. Canadian health groups are also urging the Canadian government to compel Medicago to remove its tobacco interests, instead of forcing WHO to bend treaty rules,⁴ undermining institutional integrity.

We ask WHO to stand firm in its position. A [briefing paper](#) describes how **the tobacco industry could use a tobacco-based vaccine to further its so-called Corporate Social Responsibility activities, especially in Low-and-Middle-Income Countries (LMICs), and undermine hard-fought life-saving tobacco control policies.** Concerns about the tobacco industry's pharmaceutical strategy are shared by countries around the world. In November 2021, Parties to the WHO FCTC raised concerns that **tobacco industry acquisitions in the pharmaceutical sector "could complicate and hinder tobacco control implementation.**⁵ For instance, it could lead to tobacco companies benefiting from government incentives awarded to tobacco-owned pharmaceutical companies, when the WHO FCTC commits governments to not give incentives to tobacco companies to run its business.⁶

Tobacco use claims over eight million lives annually, which exceeds the total death toll from COVID-19,⁷ and tobacco industry interference has been described as the [largest barrier to tobacco control](#) globally. We trust that WHO will be steadfast in its effort to protect public health policies from the commercial and vested interests of the tobacco industry.

SIGNED,

1. African Tobacco Control Alliance (ATCA)
2. Alianza Dominicana Antitabaquismo
3. Alianza por la Salud
4. Alliance of Women against tobacco
5. Alternatives Durables pour le Développement
6. Action on Smoking & Health (ASH Canada)
7. Action on Smoking & Health (ASH Finland)
8. Action on Smoking & Health (ASH-Scotland)
9. Asia Pacific Cities Alliance for Health and Development (APCAT)
10. Asian Consultancy on Tobacco Control
11. Associação Moçambicana de Saúde Pública
12. Association de femmes Elat-Meyong
13. Austrian Council on Smoking and Health
14. Cancer Research UK
15. Centre for Combating Tobacco (CCT)
16. Centro de Información y Educación para la Prevención del Abuso de Drogas (Cedro)
17. Centro de investigación para la epidemia del tabaquismo (CIET)
18. Citizen News Service (CNS)
19. CNCT Comité National Contre le Tabagisme
20. Coalición México Salud-Hable
21. Coalición Latinoamericana Saludable (CLAS)
22. Comisión Nacional Permanente de Lucha Antitabáquica Colat
23. Consumer Information Network (CIN)
24. Corporate Accountability
25. Demain sera Non-Fumeur
26. Dominicana Saludable
27. Educar Consumidores Colombia
28. European Network for Smoking and Tobacco Prevention aisbl
29. European Respiratory Society
30. Faculty of Health Sciences, Curtin University
31. FIC Bolivia
32. Framework Convention Alliance (FCA)
33. Fundación Anáas
34. Fundación Interamericana del Corazón, Argentina (FIC Argentina)
35. Fundahabla
36. Gracias No Fumo SC
37. Healis Sekhsaria Institute of Public Health
38. Health Funds for a Smokefree Netherlands
39. Heath Rights and Tobacco Control Network
40. Institute of Leadership and Development (INSLA)
41. InterAmerican Heart Foundation
42. Japan Society for Tobacco Control
43. Menzies School of Health Research, Charles Darwin University, Australia
44. Norwegian Cancer Society
45. Peruvian American Medical Society
46. Physicians for a Smoke-Free Canada
47. PROGGA (Knowledge for Progress)
48. Red Nacional Antitabaco (RENATA)
49. Smoke Free Israel
50. Smoke-free Cities Asia Pacific Network (SCAN)

51. Sociedad Uruguaya de Tabacología
52. Southeast Asia Tobacco Control Alliance (SEATCA)
53. Súmate
54. Swiss Association for Tobacco Control
55. Taiwan Medical Alliance on the Control of Tobacco (TMACT)
56. Tanzania Tobacco Control Forum
57. Tobacco Control Alliance
58. Tobacco Free Association of Zambia.
59. Tobacco Free Portfolios
60. Unfairtobacco / BLUE 21
61. Vision for Alternative Development (VALD)
62. XQNS
63. Zambia Heart and Stroke Foundation

References

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- ¹ Corinne Gretler. *Medicago's COVID shot faces WHO rejection over firm's tobacco ties*. Bloomberg News; March 16, 2022. Available at: <https://www.bnnbloomberg.ca/medicago-s-covid-shot-faces-who-rejection-over-firm-s-tobacco-ties-1.1738759>
- ² Alex Ralph. *Vaccine is opposed over ties to tobacco industry*. The Times; March 19, 2022. Available at: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/vaccine-is-opposed-over-ties-to-tobacco-industry-frbw05hx5>
- ³ *GSK and Medicago announce collaboration to develop a novel adjuvanted COVID-19 candidate vaccine*. News Releases, Medicago; July 7, 2020. Available at: <https://medicago.com/en/press-release/gsk-and-medicago-announce-collaboration-to-develop-a-novel-adjuvanted-covid-19-candidate-vaccine/>
See also: James Paton. *Glaxo Teams With Philip Morris-Backed Biotech on Covid Vaccine*. Bloomberg Quint, July 7, 2020. Available at: <https://www.bloombergquint.com/onweb/glaxo-and-medicago-team-up-on-plant-based-covid-vaccine>
- ⁴ *Medicago, Philip Morris and Health Canada: A predictable and avoidable fiasco*. Physicians for a Smoke-Free Canada; March 22, 2022. Available at: <https://smoke-free.ca/medicago-philip-morris-and-health-canada-a-predictable-and-avoidable-fiasco/>
- ⁵ *Declaration on WHO FCTC and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic*. Conference of the Parties to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, FCTC/COP9(10); November 12, 2021. Available at: https://untobaccocontrol.org/downloads/cop9/decisions/FCTC_COP9_10_EN.pdf
- ⁶ *Big Tobacco's Investments in and Acquisitions of Pharmaceutical Companies*. STOP; October 5, 2021. Available at: <https://exposetobacco.org/resource/tobacco-and-pharma/>
- ⁷ As of April 3, 2022, the global death toll for COVID-19 is approximately 6.1 million. See: Cumulative confirmed COVID-19 deaths, Coronavirus (COVID-19) Deaths. Our World in Data. Available at: <https://ourworldindata.org/covid-deaths#what-is-the-cumulative-number-of-confirmed-deaths>