

Maldives



Summary of Findings

1. INDUSTRY PARTICIPATION IN POLICY DEVELOPMENT

The government does not accept support, endorse any offer of assistance, or collaborate with the tobacco industry (TI), tobacco importers, or distributors in the country. However, it should be noted that the distributors are also involved in other retail businesses such as food, beverages and cosmetics which provides other avenues of access to the government.

The Tobacco Control Board allocates a representation slot for the business community who may have direct connections to tobacco importers and retailers that could influence policies being made in relation to tobacco control.

2. INDUSTRY CSR ACTIVITIES

The government and its officials do not endorse or support forms of partnerships with, or participate in, so-called corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities organized by the TI. All forms of tobacco sponsorship are prohibited. Officials must sign a declaration of interest (DOI) document to ensure there is no conflict of interest. It is difficult to verify if "bribes" have been given- there are no reports of tobacco-related cases in the public domain. There may be ways to indirectly influence an official but these cannot be verified.

3. BENEFITS TO THE INDUSTRY

International passengers are eligible for import duty allowance up to a limit of 200 cigarettes or 25 cigars or 250g of tobacco.

Act No. 31/79 (Export Import Act of Maldives) requires that "200% of the cost, insurance and freight (CIF) value of tobacco products (other than cigarettes) and articles

used in the consumption of tobacco products, are levied at the time of importation; further, a 6% goods and services tax (GST) is levied at the point of sale. However, gadgets used in the consumption of ENDS/ENNDS are taxed as electronic devices rather than as articles used for consumption of tobacco products.

Bilateral free trade agreements exist between Maldives and some other countries where tax exemptions are given. This may come up to zero tax in an incremental decline on a yearly basis.

4. UNNECESSARY INTERACTION

No publicly available evidence from the reporting period indicates that top-level government officials met with or fostered relations with the TI, nor did they attend social functions or events organized by those furthering their interests. However, no publicly available evidence does not mean that they did not take place.

5. TRANSPARENCY

The government does not disclose records of any meetings the government may have had with the tobacco distributors. It does not have any mechanisms to ensure that the public has access to a wide range of information on TI activities relevant to the objectives of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC). Rules for the disclosure or registration of TI entities or affiliated organizations do not exist.

6. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The government does not prohibit contributions from the TI or any entity working to further its interests to political parties, candidates or campaigns. In the past Maldives has witnessed relatives or owners of the tobacco importers

and retailers becoming government officials. They occupy positions across all sectors, health or non-health; actively influencing the government's policies.

7. PREVENTIVE MEASURES

The Tobacco Control Act (Articles 26 and 27) specifies information to be made public as well as the format of report in accordance with the requirements of the regulations to be submitted to the Ministry of Health. While the procedures are in place, information is not disclosed on a regular basis.

Moreover, the government of Maldives did not utilize the "Guidelines for Implementation of Article 5.3 of the

WHO FCTC" over the past reporting periods since 2016. Currently it still does not provide access to a wide range of information on the TI to the general public.

The Tobacco Control Act (Act No. 15/2010) requires relevant government ministries to organize and conduct programs and activities to create awareness and provide information to the public on the harmful effects of tobacco production and tobacco smoking on health, the economy, the environment and society. However, the government does not have such a program to consistently raise awareness either publicly or within its departments.

Recommendations

1. Disallow the TI industry from participating in the Tobacco Control Board which determines and sets policies concerning tobacco control.
2. Prohibit any incentives provided to importing tobacco into the country.
3. Restrict interaction with the TI to only when necessary. To facilitate this, funds and technical assistance from entities that have ties with the TI should be rejected and all necessary interactions should be carried out in a transparent manner.
4. Hasten the draft and implementation of the code of conduct for government institutions.
5. Implement the rules set by the Health Protection Agency for public officials and organizations in regard to use of tobacco and other unhealthy products.
6. Monitor enforcement and ensure implementation of the existing regulations under the Tobacco Control Act.