Tunisia

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SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1. Industry Participation in Policy Development

Tunisia demonstrates significant vulnerabilities in protecting policy development from tobacco industry (TI) influence. While no direct evidence exists of the government accepting industry assistance in health policy development or industry-drafted policies, a critical structural conflict undermines policy independence: the Minister of Finance also chairs the Board of Directors of the Régie Nationale des Tabacs et des Allumettes (RNTA) while overseeing health budget allocations, with three other Finance Ministry officials also serving on the board. This arrangement creates direct channels for TI influence in government bodies responsible for public health policy. In addition, the absence of transparency in the 2023 anti-tobacco action plan and the lack of disclosure requirements for potential industry ties among international delegates highlight gaps in protective measures.

2. Industry CSR Activities

The government has frequently accepted and publicized contributions from both state-owned and international tobacco companies. RNTA donated 100,000 Tunisian dinars to the COVID-19 solidarity fund and 19 oxygen concentrators to hospitals during 2020–2021. Philip Morris International contributed USD 175,000 to the Ministry of Health for COVID-19 relief in 2020.

3. Benefits to the Industry

The government has not adhered to WHO-recommended timelines for implementing tobacco control measures, instead extending implementation periods well beyond global standards. Multiple fiscal privileges, including reduced consumption taxes on certain tobacco products and special exemptions in finance laws, have been documented. Misleading product descriptors and pricing arrangements also remain permitted, favoring industry interests over regulatory compliance.

4. Unnecessary Interaction

High levels of unnecessary interaction between government officials and the TI have been documented. Evidence includes participation in official conferences, parliamentary visits, and enforcement cooperation where authorities accepted TI training on anti-smuggling operations. Of particular concern, parliamentary committees expressed explicit support for the state-owned tobacco monopoly's concerns, effectively endorsing industry interests on the basis of revenue contributions.

5. Transparency

Significant transparency gaps remain regarding TI interactions and oversight. While some procurement information is publicly available, decisions on pricing and industry engagement are not disclosed. No systems exist to require registration of tobacco companies, affiliated organizations, or lobbyists. Although general asset declaration laws apply to public officials, they do not specifically address TI-related activities. Oversight mechanisms were further weakened when the anti-corruption authority was suspended in 2021, reducing transparency obligations around TI influence.

6. Conflict of Interest

Tunisia lacks specific legislation prohibiting TI contributions to political parties, candidates, or campaigns. Official reports document financial arrangements where the state tobacco agency covered expenses for Ministry of Finance staff and provided tobacco products as monthly allowances to government officials, creating financial dependencies across multiple departments.

7. Preventive Measures

Tunisia has no comprehensive preventive measures to protect against TI interference. No procedures exist for disclosing records of TI interactions. While the government claims to use WHO FCTC Article 5.3 guidelines, no publicly available implementation details exist. State-owned entities publish some activity reports, but international companies do not provide country-specific information on their activities in Tunisia. There are no awareness programs for government departments on Article 5.3 guidelines or TI interference tactics. No policies prohibit acceptance of TI contributions, gifts, or assistance by government officials.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Separate the Ministry of Finance from TI management by establishing an independent tobacco regulatory authority where the Ministry of Finance is not represented. This would eliminate conflicts between revenue generation and public health protection and ensure the Régie Nationale des Tabacs et des Allumettes (RNTA) is treated like any other TI actor.
2. Mandate public disclosure of all government–TI interactions by adopting procedures that require publication of records of meetings, gatherings, and events involving public officials, parliamentarians, and election candidates with TI representatives or front groups. Disclosures must include agendas, lists of attendees, minutes, purposes, and outcomes.
3. Require public reporting by international TI companies operating in Tunisia. Reports should disclose revenues, marketing expenditures and activities, market share, lobbying activities, political contributions, CSR donations, and all interactions with government officials.
4. Prohibit all TI CSR activities and contributions by enacting comprehensive legislation banning government acceptance of TI donations, gifts, assistance, philanthropic initiatives, or enforcement support.
5. Strengthen preventive measures and awareness by developing a government-wide code of conduct and best practices manual for dealing with the TI, and deliver training programs for public officials and parliamentarians on Article 5.3 of the WHO FCTC and TI interference tactics.