

Cambodia



SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1. Industry Participation in Policy Development

The government does not accept offers of assistance from the tobacco industry. The government does not accept offers of assistance from the tobacco industry (TI), endorse policies drafted by the TI, or invite the industry to meetings that decide tobacco control policy. However, the Association of Tobacco Industry in Cambodia (ATIC) has become increasingly aggressive in recent years, interfering with nearly all government policy initiatives. ATIC has sent letters to the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, and the Ministry of Economy and Finance requesting that excise taxes not be increased during the 7th government mandate (2023–2028) and that the proposal to raise pictorial health warnings (PHWs) on packs from 55% to 90% be postponed.

The TI is not represented in Cambodia's delegation to the COP or related meetings.

2. Industry CSR Activities

Tobacco industry corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities are not prohibited and continue to pose a challenge in Cambodia. Japan Tobacco International (JTI) is the most active in promoting CSR at both the national and provincial levels. At the national level, the Ministry of Environment signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with JTI, facilitated by the Ambassador of Japan to Cambodia. At the provincial level, JTI partnered with the Planet Water Foundation to donate drinking water tanks to communities, an initiative publicly endorsed by the governor of Banteay Srey District, Siem Reap.

3. Benefits to the Industry

Benefits continue to be granted to the TI, though not all are publicly disclosed. For example, the Ministry of Commerce announced the waiver of duties on tobacco leaves exported to Vietnam, while the Vietnamese government exempted import taxes for registered farmers producing more than 3,000 tons of leaves. These exemptions were publicized, with the Ministry of Commerce encouraging growers to use the incentives for export.

In 2023, Cambodia and Vietnam signed a bilateral agreement allowing tariff-free exports of tobacco leaves to Vietnam, effective from June 2, 2023, through December 31, 2024.

4. Unnecessary Interaction

Unnecessary interactions between government officials and the TI have been documented. The Deputy Prime Minister met with JTI's CEO and General Manager solely to build relationships. The government has also established the Cambodia–Japan Public-Private Sector Working Group, chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister and the Ambassador of Japan in Cambodia. This platform gives JTI extensive opportunities to strengthen ties with key authorities and lobby for its commercial interests.

5. Transparency

There are no rules or procedures for disclosure or registration of TI entities, affiliated organizations, or individuals acting on their behalf. This regulatory gap allows the TI to misrepresent its meetings with various government departments.



6. Conflict of Interest

A senior government official responsible for multilateral trade and economic affairs also provides legal services to a major tobacco company through a private law firm. In addition, business leaders with ownership or distribution interests in tobacco companies continue to hold seats in the Senate during the current mandate (2022–2030). The government does not prohibit contributions from the TI or its affiliates to political parties, candidates, or campaigns, nor does it require full disclosure of such contributions.

7. Preventive Measures

A Sub-Decree on the Establishment and Functioning of the Committee for Tobacco Control, passed in 2017, incorporated principles of Article 5.3. However, there is no requirement for the TI to submit information about its business operations or expenditures on marketing and philanthropy. While the Ministry of Health has discussed Article 5.3 in internal meetings with stakeholders, there is no evidence of a sustained program to consistently raise awareness of related policies.

The Ministry of Tourism has expanded its role in promoting smoke-free cities by prohibiting tourism services and venues from partnering with the TI through advertising or public events. Similarly, the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport has extended its ban on partnerships with the TI from educational institutions to all sports sectors.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Ban all forms of CSR activities by the TI.
2. Adopt a code of conduct for government officials that establishes clear procedures for interactions with the TI, limiting them to cases that are strictly necessary.
3. Ratify the Protocol on Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products and seek technical assistance from Parties rather than collaborating with the TI on voluntary activities.