Dominican Republic

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SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1. Industry Participation in Policy Development

Government agencies have actively collaborated with the tobacco industry (TI) through agreements, events, and institutional support, reinforcing its influence on public policy. For example, INDOCAL and INTABACO strengthened cooperation to promote industry-driven standards, while entities such as Proindustria, ProDominicana, and the Presidency supported the international promotion of Dominican cigars at trade fairs. Job fairs have also been organized in collaboration with the TI to facilitate mass hiring.

Educational institutions such as INFOTEP adapted technical training to the needs of the tobacco sector by creating a tobacco products school. Meanwhile, INTABACO and industry representatives were included in state programs aimed at simplifying procedures in favor of industry priorities. The Ministry of Agriculture publicly promotes tobacco cultivation as a strategic export channel.

At COP10 in February 2024, the Dominican Republic participated as a non-Party State, sending a delegation composed entirely of representatives from the diplomatic corps and ministries supportive of the TI, such as Industry, Commerce, and Agriculture, with no representatives from the health sector.

2. Industry CSR Activities

The Dominican government openly supports TI initiatives, including the creation of a tobacco training school in Tamboril, Santiago, in collaboration with ProCigar. Authorities also participated in industry events, such as the Procigar Festival, officially sponsored by the Santiago City Council. These actions reflect significant collaboration with the TI, contradicting WHO FCTC guidelines.

3. Benefits to the Industry

The government offers direct incentives to the TI, including RD$260 million in state funding for tobacco production. Despite initial tax reform proposals affecting the sector, these were withdrawn under unclear circumstances. Excise tax policies favor heated tobacco products and exempt electronic cigarettes. Authorities also actively promote the TI through events such as Tobacco and Rum Night and the Agri-Food Fair, reinforcing high levels of interference contrary to WHO FCTC guidelines.

4. Unnecessary Interaction

The government maintains a close relationship with the TI through its constant participation in inaugurations, crop launches, fairs, and promotional events, legitimizing the sector and contradicting WHO FCTC guidelines. High-level officials, including the president, have actively supported the industry's expansion and international promotion.

Authorities also facilitate trade agreements, such as tobacco export agreements with foreign companies, while earlier cooperation agreements with the TI to address illicit trade remain in place. These actions strengthen the industry's influence and undermine the country's public health commitments.

5. Transparency

The government lacks transparency regarding its interactions with the TI. There are no public records of meetings, and no rules require disclosure of the identity of industry representatives or lobbyists. A recent closed-door meeting between the acting president and TI leaders reflects this lack of transparency. In addition, Law 165-01 formally institutionalized support to the sector through the creation of INTABACO, reinforcing the TI's privileged status.

6. Conflict of Interest

The government does not restrict political financing from the TI, as established in Electoral Law 275-97. Senior officials, such as the former president and current vice president, have held senior positions in the TI, illustrating its deep-rooted influence. Current authorities, such as the Minister of Industry, publicly promote the sector, reinforcing its privileged status and alignment with state institutions in contradiction with WHO FCTC principles.

7. Preventive Measures

The government lacks specific regulations to control interactions with the TI. Although general transparency laws exist, there are no TI-specific disclosure requirements, codes of conduct for officials, or restrictions on contributions and gifts. TI executives meet freely with high-level authorities, while the government actively promotes the sector, ignoring WHO FCTC guidelines and reinforcing the industry's influence.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Prohibit the TI from participating in public health policymaking.
2. Implement clear protocols limiting interactions between public officials and the TI to those strictly necessary.
3. Establish clear safeguards to prevent undue TI influence on public officials and policymaking.
4. Develop a national strategy to accede to the WHO FCTC. In the interim, adopt and enforce a national action plan aligned with Article 5.3 to protect public health policies from TI interference.