Global Center for Good Governance in Tobacco Control
STOP. A GLOBAL TOBACCO INDUSTRY WATCHDOG

Iraq

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SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1. Industry Participation in Policy Development

Although Iraq ratified the WHO FCTC in 2007, the lack of clear policies or legal safeguards allows tobacco industry (TI) influence in public health policymaking. There are no explicit prohibitions on government engagement with the TI. The recent approval of lifting restrictions on e-cigarettes and heated tobacco products, without transparent consultation with tobacco control stakeholders, reflects outcomes favorable to industry interests.

While there is no evidence of direct lobbying or formal legislation being drafted with tobacco companies, the absence of institutional mechanisms to limit interaction or require disclosure creates a significant risk of informal TI influence in the policy process.

2. Industry CSR Activities

There is no public evidence that the Iraqi government has accepted or endorsed corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities from the TI. Major companies such as British American Tobacco, Japan Tobacco International, and local factories have not reported CSR initiatives in media or official platforms.

While the absence of CSR may appear positive, it more likely reflects the TI's preference to remain low-profile amid weak regulatory oversight, as there are no specific prohibitions against such activities.

3. Benefits to the Industry

Regulatory delays and government incentives have significantly favored the TI. The revised tobacco control law, submitted to parliament in 2016, remains unimplemented—an eight-year gap that leaves the TI as the main beneficiary.

In addition, government measures such as the 100 percent customs duty on imported cigarettes introduced in 2023 protect local production, including factories tied to the government and their private partners, from market competition. These actions indicate a policy stance that prioritizes economic and political interests over public health, reinforcing the TI's position.

4. Unnecessary Interaction

During the reporting period, unnecessary and non-transparent interactions occurred between public officials and the TI. In 2023, the Minister of Education visited the state-owned Nasr Tobacco and Cigarette Factory for textbook printing, normalizing engagement with the TI outside regulatory purposes.

The government also pursued new public-private partnerships to boost tobacco production, including reactivating the Nasr Factory, without clear terms, consultations, or safeguards against industry influence. With no policies requiring officials to report or limit such interactions, Iraq remains vulnerable to TI interference, undermining its obligations under Article 5.3 of the WHO FCTC.

5. Transparency

Iraq lacks transparency in its interactions with the TI. Government agencies are not required to publish or coordinate records of meetings, agendas, participants, or outcomes, and there are no legal obligations to disclose such engagements.

Similarly, tobacco companies, affiliated groups, and lobbyists are not required to register or report their activities, making it nearly impossible to track or hold them accountable. This absence of transparency enables the TI to operate discreetly and represents a breach of Iraq's obligations under Article 5.3 of the WHO FCTC.

6. Conflict of Interest

Iraq lacks adequate safeguards to prevent conflicts of interest between government officials and the TI. There are no laws prohibiting or requiring disclosure of political contributions, donations, or financial ties to the TI.

There are also no rules governing post-government employment in tobacco companies or mandatory cooling-off periods, leaving space for undue influence even if no such cases have been reported. The absence of disclosure requirements regarding officials or their families working in the TI means potential conflicts remain unaddressed.

7. Preventive Measures

Iraq has made no progress in establishing safeguards against TI interference in public health policy. There are no requirements for government agencies to disclose meetings with the TI, no code of conduct for officials, and no restrictions on accepting gifts or assistance from tobacco companies.

While the government gathers limited data from state-owned enterprises, private and multinational companies face no obligation to report on their marketing, lobbying, or political activities. Awareness of Article 5.3 of the WHO FCTC remains low within government institutions, with existing efforts focused on general anti-smoking campaigns rather than preventing TI influence.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Enforce mandatory transparency by requiring all tobacco companies, both local and transnational, to publicly report their activities in Iraq, including marketing, lobbying, philanthropy, and political donations, through a standardized reporting and verification process.
2. Accelerate adoption of the new tobacco control law and strengthen implementation of existing regulations, including stricter enforcement of public smoking bans, higher taxes on tobacco products, and tougher penalties for sales to minors and unlicensed vendors.
3. End preferential treatment or partnerships with tobacco companies, ensuring that state-owned factories such as Baghdad Tobacco Company and Nasr operate under the same rules as private entities, without tax exemptions or policy influence.
4. Establish a national registry of all tobacco importers, distributors, affiliated organizations, and individuals acting on behalf of the TI, to be publicly accessible and monitored by an independent regulatory body.
5. Adopt a national awareness program across all ministries to operationalize Article 5.3 of the WHO FCTC, including a code of conduct for public officials and mandatory training to prevent conflicts of interest with the TI.