Oman

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SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1. Industry Participation in Policy Development

In September 2023, Oman became the second country in the region after Saudi Arabia to implement a plain packaging law. In February 2025, the draft tobacco control law was approved by the Shura Council (Lower House) and referred to the State Council for their review. When passed, it would be the first comprehensive tobacco law issued in Oman.

No evidence was found in the public domain that the government accepts any support from the tobacco industry (TI) in tobacco control policy development.

2. Industry CSR Activities

All TI corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities were supported by Eshraqa Foundation, the CSR arm of Khimji Ramdas, the tobacco distributor for Philip Morris International. For the review period, they engaged in ten activities with the public sector, five of which occurred at the national level. High-level government officials participated in six activities. All activities involved the education, social development, or health sectors, and targeted children, young people, women, or people with disabilities.

3. Benefits to the Industry

No evidence was found in the public domain of government agencies attending to requests submitted by the TI. For instance, the fines and implementation timelines in the latest regulations and standards are consistent with earlier ones. However, as noted in previous reports, a Royal Decree issued in 2019 granted an exemption for tobacco imported into the northern governorate of Musandam, which borders the United Arab Emirates, whereby only a 1% ad valorem tax is applied as an administrative fee.

4. Unnecessary Interaction

While no evidence was found in the public domain of the government accepting assistance from the TI or entering into partnership with it, the official recognition of the CSR arm of a tobacco agent, the Eshraqa Charitable Foundation with a capital of 1 million Omani riyals, serves to legitimize its purported contributions to society.

5. Transparency

No evidence was found in the public domain regarding government meetings or interactions with the TI, or about rules requiring the government to disclose or register TI entities and their affiliated organizations.

6. Conflict of Interest

As reported in 2023, three government officials continue to hold positions linked to the TI. The most significant is that the Director of the Khimji Ramdas Group is an advisor for foreign trade and international cooperation at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion. As an advisor, he has been part of the Omani delegation for state visits and other high-level bilateral discussions. Other officials include a Board member of WJ Towell (agent for BAT under one of seven clusters), who was appointed in September 2020 to the six-member Board of Governors of the Central Bank of Oman for a five-year term, and the WJ Towell Group Vice Chairman and Managing Director, who is the Chairman of the

Executive Committee on the Oman Investment Authority to the Board of Directors for the Muscat Stock Exchange. A former Minister of Finance is a Board Member of one of the tobacco distributors.

7. Preventive Measures

There was no evidence found in the public domain about requirements for the government to disclose records of interaction with the TI and its representatives, or for the TI to periodically submit information on tobacco production, manufacture, market share, marketing expenditures, revenues, or any other activity.

There is a policy for members of the multisectoral national tobacco control committee prohibiting them from receiving donations and accepting subsidies from tobacco companies or their agents. A circular was distributed to all government ministries instructing them not to purchase medicines or accept donations from agents of the TI in Oman. No evidence of its implementation or accountability mechanisms was found in the public domain.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Ensure that the draft Tobacco Control Law under discussion is comprehensive and aligned with all aspects and recommendations of the WHO FCTC, including controlling tobacco promotional activities and banning sponsorship of events, including philanthropic activities (financial or in-kind) by tobacco distributors with government entities.
2. Inform and educate all branches of government and the public about the need to protect public health policies from the commercial and other vested interests of the TI.
3. Expand the National Committee for Tobacco Control's code of conduct to all government officials and amend the civil service code to limit interactions with the TI to only when strictly necessary for regulation.
4. Establish a system to regularly collect and disseminate information on tobacco market share, marketing expenditures, revenues, philanthropy, and other activities to promote transparency of all TI operations and activities in the country.