

Report: Big Tobacco intensifying efforts to derail policy in Latin America

Findings make case for stronger safeguards on eve of tobacco treaty talks

4.11.2021

Bogotá, Colombia -- The tobacco industry's efforts to block health policy across Latin America are expanding. Strong, national policies to guard against interference are succeeding. These are the principal findings of the [2nd Latin America Tobacco Industry Interference Index](#) released today by [Corporate Accountability](#) in coordination with [STOP](#) and a coalition of civil society organizations and researchers across 18 Latin American countries.

The Index and its findings are prompting growing urgency for regional governments to enshrine and fully implement the [global tobacco treaty's](#) (WHO FCTC) [groundbreaking protections](#) against industry interference in public policy. This interference is seen as a primary obstacle to the adoption of policies that could significantly reduce the [staggering death toll from and rates of tobacco-related disease](#) across the region. And with tobacco products exacerbating the severity of COVID cases, public health leaders see November treaty talks as an opportunity to accelerate global action to counter Big Tobacco.

“The tobacco industry has had no qualms about [profiting from the COVID-19](#) pandemic, attempting to clean up its image by assisting governments, while continuing to interfere in the implementation of the WHO FCTC,” said Dr. Adriana Blanco Marquizo, head of the secretariat of the global tobacco treaty, during the Index's launch event.

The Index found that across the countries surveyed, one of the main tactics used to gain access *to* and buy goodwill *among* policymakers was corporate social responsibility (CSR) aimed at, for one, obscuring Big Tobacco's role in exacerbating today's pandemic. In many countries surveyed, the industry's interference is more direct even. Industry helps draft its own regulation. Industry participates in policy talks.

Of the eighteen countries surveyed for the second year in a row, all, with the exception of Chile, Colombia, and Costa Rica, scored higher in the degree of industry interference they were facing. The countries with the worst marks for interference were the Dominican Republic and Argentina. Both have yet to ratify the global tobacco treaty. Uruguay and Costa Rica ranked best overall.

“There is a roadmap for clearing the obstacles Big Tobacco erects to saving lives and preventing human suffering,” according to two of the report authors Laura Salgado of [The Global Center for Good Governance in Tobacco Control](#) and Jaime Arcila of Corporate

Accountability. “It’s in the treaty. If followed, these scores will drastically improve year on year. And the health of tens of millions will be better for it.”

Among the recommendations of the Index, is a call for governments to fully disclose the conflicts of interests of their delegates to this November’s treaty talks. But as professor [Stella Bialous](#) noted at the Index’s launch event, “transparency is a necessary but not a sufficient step to ensure that any interaction between governments and the tobacco industry, when it occurs, is open to societal scrutiny.” To this end, the Index also recommends countries like Argentina ratify the treaty and that countries cease “partnering” with Big Tobacco on so-called CSR.

For the recording of the Index launch event, [click here](#). For the first Global Tobacco Industry Interference Index, of which the Latin America Index is part, [click here](#). For quotes from speakers at the launch event, [click here](#).

Methodology: To calculate the level of interference, each country had to answer a questionnaire designed by the Southeast Asia Tobacco Control Alliance (SEATCA), to discover the ways in which governments are complying with Article 5.3 of the WHO FCTC. The questionnaire measures seven indicators and includes twenty questions that can be found at this [link](#).

###

Contact Information:

Jaime Arcila (he/him), Spanish-language inquiries, jarcila@corporateaccountability.org,
Nick Guroff (he/him), English-language inquiries, nguroff@corporateaccountability.org,
+16177844753

About Corporate Accountability

Corporate Accountability stops transnational corporations from devastating democracy, trampling human rights, and destroying our planet.

###

“The tobacco epidemic is a serious health, economic, and social problem, affecting sustainable development and is caused by the industry,” said event moderator Dr. Eduardo Bianco, member of the Uruguay-based Center for International Cooperation on Tobacco Control (CCICT).

"Implementation of Article 5.3 of the Convention in all spheres of government is the remedy to protect tobacco control policies from the predatory practices of an industry that produces a product that kills at least half of its consumers," said Dr. Adriana Blanco Marquizo, head of the secretariat of the WHO FCTC.

"As stated in Article 5.3 of the Convention, 'there is a fundamental and irreconcilable conflict between the interests of the tobacco industry and the interests of public health policies.' The intense lobbying that the tobacco industry carries out to interfere in public policies to benefit its own interests, while harming public health...the creative way in which this industry uses even the greatest world misfortunes to show itself as 'socially responsible' in order to deceive the population with its false discourse of interest towards the welfare of all...and the ruses they employ to approach public officials who can safeguard their interests, are the most common actions found in the Latin American region. We hope that this document will stimulate reflection and debate to help each country adopt new measures and reinforce existing ones to counteract this interference and encourage governments to work in collaboration with civil society groups to ratify and implement the WHO FCTC; and thus, be able to comply with the guidelines for the implementation of Article 5.3 of the WHO FCTC," said Jaime Arcila, researcher and coordinator of Corporate Accountability's Latin America Office, and Laura Salgado, Global Campaigns Coordinator of the Global Center for Good Governance in Tobacco Control (GGTC).

"Effective tobacco control requires a coordinated, whole-of-government approach. States – not just health ministries – are Parties to the WHO FCTC, and entire governments are responsible for treaty implementation. This is why WHO FCTC Article 5 -- multisectoral planning, coordination and prevention of industry interference -- positions tobacco control governance as a general, or foundational, obligation for Parties. Strong multisectoral coordination and planning must be accompanied by measures to prevent industry interference, including codes of conduct, transparency measures, and comprehensive policies to advance and sustain implementation of Article 5.3 COP guidelines." Daniel Grafton, Policy Specialist, United Nations Development Program (UNDP)

"Contrasting the economic and social burden that smoking generates...it is outrageous that for pennies (compared to the size of the costs that smoking generates) we allow the tobacco industry to present itself as a messiah and also, with these CSR actions, to continue, not only winning political space to continue profiting at everyone's expense, but promoting their products to attract the attention of young people to the consumption of their lethal products," said Gabriela Friedrich of Alianza Juvenil - CLAS.

"The tobacco industry, besides poisoning our bodies, wants to deceive our intelligence. To have cigarette butts and lighters picked up from the garbage is not social responsibility, it is fake news. Creating a less poisonous product is not social responsibility, it is fake science. Sponsoring an art installation is not social responsibility, it's fake art," said Yahir Acosta, Director de Investigación Jurídica ETHOS - Laboratorio de Políticas Públicas.

"Tobacco industry interference is and continues to be one of the main threats to tobacco control in the Americas region. Governments must be vigilant and attentive to protect the findings and advances in tobacco control and prevent any setbacks," said Adriana Bacelar, PAHO/WHO Tobacco Surveillance Specialist.

"How do we address the challenges to implementing the WHO FCTC Article 5.3 and protecting governments from tobacco industry interference?"

The FCTC provides specific measures to protect governments such as effectively implementing a national coordination mechanism for sustainable tobacco control, having civil society ensure transparency, and protecting COP and MOP meetings against industry interference," said Joao Ricardo Rodrigues Viegas, MOP Regional Coordinator, AMRO.