

Media Release: 23 September 2021

2021 SA Tobacco Industry Interference Index Report signals high tobacco industry interference with policy and government institutions in South Africa

Statement of the National Council Against Smoking (NCAS)

Johannesburg, SA – The South African government is not doing enough to stop tobacco industry interference with policy. This is revealed by the [2021 Tobacco Industry Interference Index Report](#) (index) for South Africa launched today. The index is an annual review of how governments protect public health policies from tobacco industry influence.

The index shows a decline in efforts to protect government policy and processes from tobacco industry influence. South Africa has deteriorated 6 points indicating increases in tobacco industry interference. The index also confirms calls for a tighter grip on tobacco company activities.

It also echoes calls for British American Tobacco (BAT) to be investigated on serious accusations of bribery of officials, illegal surveillance, and illegal access to classified information in South Africa. To date, no formal investigations have been reported, raising concerns that tobacco companies are granted too much room to influence policy and governance.

“It is disappointing that the tobacco industry remains healthy, whilst its customers grow ill and die. We need to do more to stop industry influence in policy,” says Dr Yussuf Saloojee, interim executive director of the National Council Against Smoking (NCAS). “South Africa does poorly in transparency. Meetings with tobacco manufactures are not announced and minutes are not available to the public.”

“The tobacco industry likes operating in the dark, where they can meddle with policy decisions,” says Dr Mary Assunta, Head of Global Research and Advocacy from the Global Centre for Good Governance in Tobacco Control (GGTC). “We see that countries that do well in stopping tobacco industry interference are transparent in their dealings with the industry. We encourage South Africa to do the same, to record and share meetings and any political donations from the tobacco industry.”

Dr Assunta says the tobacco industry has not changed, “The tobacco industry has stepped up its efforts. Publicly this is denied, but it is clear that the tobacco industry is fighting tooth and nail to sabotage government efforts and effective regulation. Countries around the world report that industry interference remains the biggest obstacle to the implementation of strong tobacco control law.”

South African government departments are still partnering with tobacco companies, the index reveals. For example, the index cites that non-health government departments are partnering with NGOs funded by the tobacco industry. The index also highlights the lack of transparency on interactions between the tobacco industry and government agencies as a problem. The tobacco companies often use corporate

social responsibility activities to gain influence, infiltrate institutions, undermine public policy, and push its own agenda.

“The tobacco industry successfully moves the issue from health to economics. They overplay the economic importance of the industry,” says Professor Olalekan Ayo-Yusuf, Director of the African Centre for Tobacco Industry Monitoring and Policy Research (ATIM), Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University. Government has too many ears for the industry. It is time to be bold and prioritise the health of the nation.”

Prof Ayo-Yusuf continued, “South Africa should ratify the Protocol for the elimination of illicit trade of tobacco products and an independent and effective track and trace system for all tobacco products must be implemented, as illicit trade is a significant problem. We must rapidly increase excise tax, as industry demonstrated room for this by increasing prices post the COVID-19 cigarette sales ban. Government needs to urgently finalise the Control of Tobacco Products and Electronic Delivery Systems Bill to curb youth addiction.”

“South Africa’s Tobacco Control Bill, which has clear benefits for the country, including saving lives, protecting non-smokers, and saving state revenue, has been delayed for over three years,” says Dr Sharon Nyatsanza, Project and Communications Manager at NCAS. “In part, the delay is due to tobacco companies being granted many opportunities to influence policy, as the index highlights. The tobacco industry remains the greatest obstacle to implementation of tobacco control policy and will continue to use its financial muscle to challenge, and delay policy unless government takes strong action against this.”

NCAS highlighted recommendations made by the index. “We call for government to pass the Tobacco Control Bill as law. Illicit tobacco trade must be tackled urgently, and an independent track and trace system must be introduced, but SARS should not involve tobacco companies in these processes. Interactions between political decision-makers and the tobacco industry must be limited, and done openly, government should not partner or accept sponsorship from this industry,” says Nyatsanza. “Adopting the index recommendations will result in significant declines in tobacco industry interference.”

[ENDS]

SOUTH AFRICA 2021 TOBACCO INDUSTRY INTERFERENCE INDEX REPORT:

https://841e1e5c-cd4b-4521-abe7-8d810b959f2b.filesusr.com/ugd/0a15f0_f97bbbd7b469432f8defe0d8c67ceec8.pdf

PRESS OFFICE FOR LAUNCH PRESENTATIONS:

https://www.dropbox.com/sh/oxquq5obtf59w22/AAAc9YMB_XfVXZYjFWGX_IWda?dl=0

LAUNCH WEBINAR LINK:

https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/7nvG3RyaVdi8Md3W2p5JKDvi9Xax-zFaj8s2v3ZLbJGEnDI65_bPiCXcsbuDEgJy.k_IxLT6jBeXm9eGM

Passcode: S%!h#UY0

For further information contact:

Sharon Nyatsanza

Project and Communications Manager

sharon@againstmoking.org.za

Media contact:

Tamaryn Brown

084 3510560 / tamaryn@connectmedia.co.za