

Oman

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Summary of Findings

1. Industry participation in policy development

The Oman government does not allow or invite the tobacco industry (TI) to sit in its multisectoral group that sets public policy and Oman's delegation to the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) Conference of the Parties (COP) meetings excludes representatives from the tobacco industry. No evidence was found in the public domain that the government accepts support from the TI in tobacco control policy development; nevertheless, tobacco control laws and regulations are not as comprehensive as outlined in the FCTC.

2. Industry CSR activities

Khimji Ramdas, the distributor for Philip Morris, portrays themselves as a generous family-run business and has a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Arm, Eshraqa, that is engaged in a large number of activities and sponsorships with the public sector. For the period of this review, Khimji Ramdas has signed four Memoranda of Understandings with the public sector plus an exclusive sponsorship agreement, supported national sporting events, provided training for Omani youth, donated various health and education equipment and supplies to local public health and education institutions and supported a number of other sub-national activities.

Enhance Oman, the distributor for British American Tobacco (BAT), comes under the WJ Towell group of companies. Unlike Khimji Ramdas, their CSR activities seem to focus on individuals and charities. In the past two

years, CSR activities related to the public sector involved sponsorship for a National Environmental Forum and a donation to a tertiary care hospital in the capital area.

3. Benefits to the industry

There is no evidence found in the public domain of the government attending to requests submitted by the TI. The new Excise Tax on "sin" products, for example, grants no exemptions on goods purchased prior to the implementation date except for an exemption for tobacco imported into Musandam, the northern governorate bordering the United Arab Emirates.

4. Unnecessary interaction

There were three occurrences of unnecessary forms of interaction in the past two years including when a Board Member of Khimji Ramdas, who served as Minister of Commerce and Industry for twenty years, joined the government delegation to a special session held to celebrate Oman joining the World Trade Organization. No evidence was found in the public domain of the government accepting assistance from the TI or entering into a partnership. However, a public university entered into partnership with the Philip Morris International (PMI)-funded Foundation for a Smoke-Free World to conduct research on heated tobacco products and e-cigarettes.

5. Transparency

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



6. Conflict of interest

There is evidence for potential conflicts of interest. A former Minister of Commerce and Industry is a Group Adviser in Khimji Ramdas and in September 2020 was appointed to the six-member Board of Governors of the Central Bank of Oman for a five-year term.

Although elected officials are only allowed to use personal funds for campaigning and the media has reported on some parliamentarians participating in CSR-related events sponsored by the TI, there is no publicly available evidence to connect individuals in public office to the tobacco business.

7. Preventive measures

There was no evidence found in the public domain about requirements of the government to disclose records of interaction with the TI and its representatives and of the TI to periodically submit information on tobacco production, manufacture, market share, marketing expenditures, revenues and any other activity. On the other hand, 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. However, it does not apply for the whole government leaving the avenue open for the TI to approach other public officials.

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The distributor for Philip Morris has signed several Memoranda of Understandings with the public sector including an exclusive sponsorship agreement supporting national sporting events, provide training for Omani youth, and donations of various health and education equipment and supplies to local public health and education institutions.”

Recommendations

1. Inform and educate all branches of government and the public about the need to protect public health policies for tobacco control from commercial and other vested interested of the TI, as well as the strategies used by the TI to interfere with the development and implementation of tobacco control policies and/or undermine strategies to combat illicit trade in tobacco products.
2. Expand the current code of conduct for members of the Tobacco Control Committee to all government officials, limiting interactions with the TI and prescribing the standards with which they should comply in their dealings with the TI and ensure transparency of those interactions.
3. Expand legislation controlling tobacco promotional activities to ban sponsorship of events including philanthropic activities (financial or in-kind) by the TI with government entities; the regulation should also clearly define mechanisms for enforcement.
4. Develop clear conflict of interest policies that require applicants for public office positions which have a role in setting and implementing tobacco control policies to declare any current or previous occupational activity with any TI and not allow any person employed by the TI to be a member of any government body, committee or advisory group that sets or implements tobacco control or public health policy.
5. 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 operations and activities of the TI in the country.
6. Although not directly related to TI interference, it was apparent from this review that further work is required in strengthening tobacco control policies such as:
 - 6.1. Working with other Gulf Cooperation Council countries to require stronger, larger graphic health warnings and introduce a regular review process (e.g., every six months).
 - 6.2. Reducing the affordability of both cigarettes and shisha tobacco by implementing a minimum specific tax and standard tax rates for all tobacco products, removing the duty-free status for importing tobacco into Musandam and earmarking tobacco tax revenues for tobacco control activities.
 - 6.3. Imposing a comprehensive national ban on tobacco use in enclosed public spaces by removing the allowance in sub-national laws permitting designated smoking areas and exemptions for shisha cafes.