

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**Brazen – or clueless – Brazilian official puts links to tobacco industry in writing**

WASHINGTON, 14 July – Let’s say you were taking money for engaging in behaviour that you knew violated office rules. How would you hide it?

You might close your door while talking on the phone; hold meetings outside of the office; even password protect any documents on your computer. But you probably wouldn’t imitate a civil servant who represented Brazil at an international tobacco control meeting last year in Uruguay.

During the week-long conference of countries that are Parties to the World Health Organization (WHO) Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), the official made numerous calls to the Brazilian subsidiary of British American Tobacco (BAT). That violated Article 5.3 of the FCTC, on tobacco industry interference with public health. It possibly also broke Brazilian Government rules on conflict of interest.

Yet when the woman submitted her expense account for the meeting, she included the costs for her calls to BAT. When the civil service commission informed her that they wouldn’t pay the bill because her claim exceeded the limit, she wrote a letter explaining that she had taken on the role of informing the industry, which is blocked from participating in FCTC meetings.

Oops!

Both the Brazilian Government and the Secretariat in charge of the FCTC need to take action, says the Brazil-based Alliance for the Control of Tobacco Use (ACT), an FCA member.

“We expect the Secretariat to take this opportunity to notify Parties about their obligations concerning article 5.3, and the Brazilian government to remove this person (from further FCTC negotiations) and to adopt clear rules for participation in FCTC meetings and in national discussions about FCTC implementation,” says ACT Executive Director Paula Johns.

FCTC Article 5.3 says, “In setting and implementing their public health policies with respect to tobacco control, Parties shall act to protect these policies from commercial and other vested interests of the tobacco industry in accordance with national law”.

Official guidelines on implementing Article 5.3, adopted unanimously by all Parties, call on Parties to avoid conflict of interest for government officials and employees and to interact with the tobacco industry only when and to the extent strictly necessary to regulate the industry and tobacco products. (Recommendation 20, 2.1).

FCA Director Laurent Huber stressed that protecting tobacco control from industry interference is a cornerstone of the FCTC. “The 174 Parties to the Convention recognise the threat posed by an industry whose products will kill 6 million people this year. This incident should be dealt with swiftly to send a message that violation of Article 5.3 and its guidelines is a serious matter.”



At the Uruguay conference, the delegation from Brazil, which is a major tobacco producer, was under strong pressure from the tobacco industry, which objected to proposed guidelines recommending Parties restrict the use of tobacco flavourings and additives. These are used to make tobacco more attractive, particularly to young smokers.

The industry even bussed in tobacco farmers from southern Brazil to Uruguay to protest the proposal, which was eventually adopted.

On Thursday, the leading Brazilian daily Folha de São Paulo reported the incident.

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