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**Philip Morris International Seeks to Buy Influence over Trade Policy
By Sponsoring Exclusive Washington, DC, Event**
Government Officials Should Decline to Attend and Protect Health, not Tobacco
Statement of Matthew L. Myers
President, Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids

WASHINGTON, DC – As the United States and other countries negotiate a trade agreement that could impact efforts to reduce tobacco use worldwide, Philip Morris International is trying to buy access and influence by sponsoring an exclusive corporate reception Friday in Washington, DC, that will be attended by top trade and other officials from the countries involved. We urge government officials not to attend this tobacco industry-sponsored reception and to negotiate a trade agreement that protects public health, not the tobacco industry. They should protect children and health around the world, not Philip Morris International, a company with a long history of targeting children, deceiving the public and opposing proven measures to reduce tobacco use and save lives.

Philip Morris International – the world’s largest multinational tobacco company – is one of the sponsors of the Governors and Ambassadors World Trade Reception being held at the Willard InterContinental Hotel on Friday evening. The event is focused on the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) Agreement, a trade agreement the U.S. is negotiating with eight other countries. Listed speakers and attendees include top U.S. trade negotiators, representatives of the other TPP countries and several U.S. state governors (information about the event can be found at: <http://www.wita.org/en/cev/1146>). This is clearly an opportunity for Philip Morris International to curry favor and lobby trade negotiators.

Philip Morris International is sponsoring this event just as TPP negotiations are scheduled to resume next week in Melbourne, Australia. Tobacco companies are working aggressively to ensure that this agreement helps them open new markets for their deadly products, despite the devastating toll in lives and health.

The U.S. and other countries should reject Big Tobacco’s lobbying and protect public health by excluding tobacco from the benefits of the TPP and other trade agreements. Trade agreements are intended to promote and expand trade in beneficial products. Tobacco products are uniquely lethal, not beneficial. In fact, they are the top cause of preventable death in the U.S. and worldwide. Tobacco products killed 100 million in the 20th century and are projected to kill one billion people in the 21st century unless nations take urgent action to protect health. Freer trade in tobacco products directly conflicts with the goal of saving lives by stemming this global epidemic.

Philip Morris International’s own actions show exactly why tobacco products should be excluded from the TPP and other trade agreements. In recent years, Philip Morris International has sued Australia, Uruguay and other countries to overturn measures to reduce tobacco use, claiming they violate trade and investment agreements. Excluding tobacco products from trade agreements will protect countries’ authority to enact such measures, as countries are obligated to do by the international tobacco control treaty, the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.

Tobacco companies also have a long history of using trade agreements to force open new markets in low- and middle-income countries, sharply increasing tobacco use and related death and disease. Philip Morris International’s most recent fourth quarter report underscored the harmful results, as its sales rose by more than 10 percent in Asia. Philip Morris International and its subsidiaries have engaged in harmful marketing that targets youth, including sponsoring concerts by pop stars and even placing billboard advertisements in Indonesia last year that touted cigarettes as “a cool friend” worth dying for. At Philip Morris International’s annual meeting last year, the company’s CEO irresponsibly played down the addictiveness of cigarettes, claiming “it is not that hard to quit.”

Trade agreements should not promote or increase use of tobacco products, and they should not prohibit any nation from using its sovereign authority to protect public health by taking action to reduce tobacco use. The United States and other nations should reject the influence of Philip Morris International and other tobacco companies and protect health, not tobacco.