

Keep Tobacco Money Out of the ILO!

Tobacco products kill 8 million people annually. Last year, the ILO rightly chose to not renew its cooperation with Japan Tobacco International and the ECLT Foundation (an organisation exclusively financed and controlled by tobacco companies).

Tobacco industry CSR activities undermine progress on health and development and stifle the ability of tobacco workers to express their freedom to associate and bargain collectively.

During its upcoming technical meeting, taking place on 3-5 July 2019 in Kampala (Uganda), the ILO needs to take ambitious steps to address the severe decent work deficits in the tobacco sector without accepting funds from the very companies that are responsible for the current hardships.

The recommended outcomes for the upcoming technical meeting are to:

- 1) Prioritize improving the bargaining position and living conditions of farmers and their families and take all necessary steps to fulfil the decision to not renew industry cooperation.
- 2) Secure and ensure the ability for tobacco workers to express their freedom to associate and bargain collectively by prioritizing policies, partnerships, and programs that are free from the vested and corruptive role of the tobacco corporations that undermine the workers and public health.
- 3) Stop the ability for tobacco companies to abuse Corporate Social Responsibility activities that ultimately paint the corporations in a positive light, while allowing countries, workers, and citizens to bear the economic, public health, and development costs associated with its business.
- 4) Urge the ILO to secure alternative funding to support tobacco workers and farmers that does not include any tobacco industry money directly or via front groups.

Tobacco companies have a long-standing history of denying health risks, fostering poverty wages and condoning unsafe working conditions among tobacco farmers and workers. They frequently interfere with the implementation of anti-smoking policies, suppress legitimate worker organizing efforts, and use corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities to hide their harmful activities and enhance their public reputation. The World Health Organisation Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) includes a provision ("Article 5.3") that calls on Parties to the treaty to enact strong measures to protect public health policymaking from the undue influence of the tobacco industry. As of today, 180 countries and the EU are Parties to the FCTC, committing to fulfil its obligations without reservations.

Tobacco Growing is Precarious and Hazardous Work

Despite growing awareness of the harms of smoking, the global cigarette industry remains one of the most profitable industries in the world selling a product that eventually kills more than 50% of its

users. Cigarette retail value is estimated to be worth US\$ 699.4 billion.¹ However, it is not the workers and farmers who profit. Tobacco growers in developing countries have a particularly weak bargaining position, as most farmers run small-scale operations and sell to big multinationals with much more market power. Cigarette manufacturers and leaf buying companies have managed to structure supply chains in ways that marginalize those at the bottom and use opaque contracting systems to obscure their obligations to those who produce their products.

Despite the tobacco industry's rhetoric about occupational safety in farming practices, growers and plantation workers continue to face harms at different stages of cultivating tobacco. Tobacco readily exposes many growers to grave chemical hazards as the use of protective clothing is uncommon. Just by handling the tobacco plant, tobacco growers and farm workers, often including children, are at risk of green tobacco sickness (GTS), caused by respiratory and dermal absorption of nicotine from contact with tobacco leaves. Tobacco farmers and farm workers are also frequently exposed to extremely high levels of agrochemicals (i.e., insecticides, herbicides, fungicides, fumigants, growth inhibitors, and ripening agents) throughout the growing cycle, many without being aware of the dangers and consequences.^{2,3,4} These problems have been documented extensively by the ILO itself (GB.329/POL/6 and GB.331/POL/5).

Tobacco CSR is Covert Advertisement, Not Effective Remedy

Since 2002, ILO had received more than US\$ 15 million from tobacco companies and its subsidiaries. This type of cooperation was the last of its kind among UN agencies and provided a platform for representatives of the tobacco industry and their subsidiaries to cast themselves as part of the solution to a problem they caused knowingly. In addition, the effectiveness of the projects in question has frequently been questioned, as indicated by trade unions active in the tobacco sector⁵^{6,7} and verified by academic research.^{8,9,10} In order to avoid scenarios in which the tobacco industry

¹ Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids. The Global Cigarette Industry Factsheet. August 2018
https://www.tobaccofreekids.org/assets/global/pdfs/en/Global_Cigarette_Industry.pdf.pdf

² Ohayo-Mitoko GJA, Heederik DJJ, Kromhout H, Omondi BEO, et al., 1997. "Acetylcholinesterase Inhibition as an Indicator of Organophosphate and Carbamate Poisoning in Kenyan Agricultural Workers". *International Journal of Occupational and Environmental Health* 3 (3):210-20

³ Cornwall JE, Ford ML, Liyanage TS, and D Win Kyi Daw,. 1995. "Risk Assessment and Health Effects of Pesticides Used in Tobacco Farming in Malaysia." *Health Policy Plan* 10 (4): 431-37

⁴ Salvi RM, Lara DR, Ghisolfi ES, Portela LV, et al. 2003. "Neuropsychiatric Evaluation on Subjects Chronologically Exposed to Organophosphate Pesticides." *Toxicology Science* 72:267-71

⁵ Tobacco and Allied Workers Union of Malawi (TOAWUM). Open letter to ILO. 29 Sep 2017.
<https://unfairtobacco.org/en/tobacco-workers-to-ilo-quit-tobacco-industry/>

⁶ Farm Labor Organizing Committee, press statement, "FLOC Addresses ECLT Board In Geneva: Freedom Of Association Is Key In Ending Child Labor," April 8, 2016, <http://www.floc.com/wordpress/tag/child-labor/>

⁷ International Union of Foodworkers, *Adopted Resolutions of the IUF 27th World Congress, Geneva, 29 August – 1 September, 2017*, "Call for action – human rights for workers in tobacco growing," pg. 35, www.iuf.org/w/sites/default/files/resolutionsforwebsite_0.pdf

⁸ Otanez MG, Muggli ME, Hurt RD, Glantz SA. Eliminating child labour in Malawi: a British American Tobacco corporate responsibility project to sidestep tobacco labour exploitation. *Tob Control*. 2006;15(3):224-230. doi:10.1136/tc.2005.014993

⁹ Otanez M and Glantz S. Social Responsibility in Tobacco Production? Tobacco Companies' use of Green Supply Chains to Obscure the Real Costs of Tobacco Farming. *Tob Control*. 2011 Nov;20(6):403-411.

¹⁰ Centre for Social Concern. Malawi at 52: Using Tenants at the Expense of Decent Work in the Tobacco Value Chains. 2017. Pg. 22

is allowed undue influence acquired through CSR financing, the WHO FCTC Articles 5.3 and 13 Guidelines recommend a ban on tobacco-related CSR activities because they are a form of sponsorship. More than two dozen countries have already enacted such a ban.¹¹

ILO Needs a Comprehensive Strategy Free from Undue Influence and Vested Interests

Tobacco CSR programs have allowed the tobacco industry to collaborate with a reputable organisation such as the ILO, boost its public image, and gain access to high-level government officials in target countries over two decades. However, the preservation or discontinuation of such programs is not central to addressing the severe deficits of the sector. The main focus of the meeting in Kampala should be to develop a comprehensive strategy that tackles the root cause of the problems in the tobacco sector, namely poor working and bargaining conditions that force farmers into financial hardships and ultimately make them turn to child labour. Investments in these areas will deliver sustainable improvements and make ‘last resort’ interventions such as industry financed CSR projects with questionable results obsolete.

Finally, the FCA would like to remind all 181 Parties to the FCTC again that Articles 5.3 and 13 Guidelines call for a ban on all CSR activities by the tobacco industry. Following the decision to end funding from the tobacco industry, the technical meeting in Kampala should move forward in finding real solutions to the problems confronting tobacco growers. Countries involved in the ILO process are also implementing the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals. The UNDP, for instance, works collaboratively with governments to end poverty and its programmes are being conducted in countries growing tobacco. Pilot projects such as the Social Impact Bond Programme that can be used to help tobacco farmers finance the switch to other viable non-tobacco livelihoods have shown great promise. The UNDP also has an explicit policy of non-engagement with the tobacco industry. Accepting funds from a business with a vested interest in the status quo of widespread child labour and weak collective bargaining structures will not deliver the sustainable solution ILO is seeking.

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¹¹ Assunta, Mary. 2018. Good country practices in the implementation of WHO FCTC Article 5.3 and its guidelines. Available at <http://www.who.int/fctc/publications/fctc-article-5-3-best-practices.pdf>.