

Cutting through the “smoke-free” smoke

Exposing Philip Morris International’s “Foundation for a Smoke-Free World”

A SHIFTING TOBACCO CONTROL LANDSCAPE

Every year, more than seven million people die from tobacco-related diseases. This epidemic is driven by Big Tobacco: an industry with more money than many of the countries in which it operates.

For decades, the tobacco industry has employed a slew of tactics to undermine public health policy and addict new generations of youth to its products: from funding junk science, to marketing and PR campaigns, to lobbying government officials at all levels.

That’s exactly why, in 2003, the global public health community came together to adopt the historic World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC). Among other groundbreaking policies, the FCTC protects public health policymaking from interference by tobacco corporations, affirms the priority of health over trade and commercial interests, and enables governments to make Big Tobacco pay for the harms it causes.

Thanks in part to the success of the FCTC and courageous government officials, NGOs, and others in the tobacco control community, the industry has been forced to adapt—and adopt new tactics.

SAME DIRTY PLAYBOOK, SHINY NEW COVER

In 2017, Philip Morris International (PMI), one of the world’s largest tobacco corporations, launched a new foundation. This foundation, called the “Foundation for a Smoke-Free World” (FSFW) is fully funded by the tobacco giant. In fact, PMI has pledged funding of \$80 million per year for 12 years.¹

Why? PMI recognizes the threat to its profits the FCTC poses. So it is attempting to reinvent itself, by developing a new generation of products to addict a new generation of customers to nicotine. These products, while indeed “smoke-free,” have not been proven effective as smoking cessation devices, nor

are they proven safe.² But PMI’s slick marketing would have you believe otherwise—and the FSFW helps advance its agenda.

The global public health community has recognized this foundation for exactly what it is: PMI’s latest attempt to regain a foothold in global tobacco control policymaking. That’s why the WHO publicly rejected the FSFW’s request for partnership.³ Prominent universities⁴ and institutions⁵ have rejected its funding. And more than one hundred public health organizations have taken action to condemn the foundation.⁶

A NEW VEHICLE FOR POLITICAL INTERFERENCE AROUND THE WORLD

A Reuters exposé in 2017 revealed that Philip Morris International has engaged in a vast, clandestine campaign to undermine the FCTC and its lifesaving public health measures, describing it as “an offensive that stretches from the Americas to Africa to Asia, from hardscrabble tobacco fields to the halls of political power.”⁷ And the thousands of internal strategy documents Reuters reviewed reveal a corporation searching for ways to polish its image and regain a foothold in public health policymaking—in PMI’s own words, by “shaping public opinion” through “the ability to find the right spin.”⁸ It’s no coincidence that the FSFW was launched around the time of this investigation: The FSFW helps PMI “find the right spin” for its deadly products and legitimize the corporation as a player once more in public policymaking.

Although PMI claims the foundation is an independent entity, the McCabe Center for Law and Cancer took a deep dive into the FSFW’s bylaws and structures and found otherwise: “[The FSFW] is more akin to a program of Philip Morris... with the fundamental settings put in place by, and enforced, by Philip Morris’s USD960 million.”⁹

The FSFW helps polish PMI's tarnished image and re-normalize its role in policymaking in a number of ways:

- 1 Build partnerships with academics to attempt to regain credibility.
- 2 Fund tobacco control research that paints its products in a positive light.
- 3 Promote "reduced harm" products, which are key to the industry's future profit growth.
- 4 Attend tobacco control/public health conferences from which the industry has been barred.
- 5 Engage with government officials to attempt to influence policymaking.

REIN IN BIG TOBACCO, SAVE LIVES

Luckily, the FCTC gives governments clear guidance on how to address entities, like the FSFW, that advance Big Tobacco's agenda. At treaty meetings in October 2018 (COP8), governments adopted a decision "noting with concern the aggressive and/or misleading tactics of the tobacco industry, and the utilization of global philanthropic approaches to finance or partner with health, scientific and economic networks and, consequently, undermine the Parties' obligations under Article 5.3 of the WHO FCTC as well as the overall objectives of the Convention" and urgently calling on Parties to raise awareness of the industry's tactics and implement policies in line with Article 5.3 to reduce industry interference.¹⁰

ENDNOTES

- 1 "WHO Statement on Philip Morris funded Foundation for a Smoke-Free World." World Health Organization. June 2, 2018. Accessed May 7, 2019. <https://www.who.int/news-room/headlines/28-09-2017-who-statement-on-philip-morris-funded-foundation-for-a-smoke-free-world>.
- 2 Lisa Rapaport. "Heat-not-burn" cigarettes still damage lungs." Reuters. September 21, 2018. Accessed May 7, 2019. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-iqos/heat-not-burn-cigarettes-still-damage-lungs-idUSKCN1M12CB>.
- 3 Anoo Bhuyan "Explained: Why a Philip Morris funded foundation is repeatedly denounced by WHO." The Wire. February 6, 2019. Accessed May 7, 2019. <https://thewire.in/health/explained-why-a-philip-morris-funded-foundation-is-repeatedly-denounced-by-who>
- 4 Anoo Bhuyan. "Top universities reject Tobacco's research funding." The Wire. December 15, 2017. Accessed May 7, 2019. <https://thewire.in/health/global-health-leaders-ask-to-be-removed-from-mailing-list-of-foundation-offering-them-tobacco-funded-grants>
- 5 Anoo Bhuyan. "Public health leaders ask to be removed from mailing list of foundation offering them tobacco-funded grants." The Wire. December 15, 2017. Accessed May 7, 2019. <https://thewire.in/health/global-health-leaders-ask-to-be-removed-from-mailing-list-of-foundation-offering-them-tobacco-funded-grants>
- 6 "An Open Letter to the Director General and Executive Board of the World Health Organization." Global Center for Good Governance in Tobacco Control. January 28, 2019. Accessed May 7, 2019. [https://ggtc.world/2019/01/28/an-open-letter-to-the-director-](https://ggtc.world/2019/01/28/an-open-letter-to-the-director-general-and-executive-board-of-the-world-health-organization/)

And as the WHO Executive Board reaffirmed at a recent meeting: "WHO will not partner with the Foundation. Governments should not partner with the Foundation and the public health community should follow this lead."¹¹

Recommendations

People all around the world are coming together to take action to demand Philip Morris International stop funding and shut down the FSFW. You can view and add your name to the global demands at CorporateAccountability.org/PMI.

In addition, governments should take action at the international and national level to:

- Reject Philip Morris International's attempts to secure a foot in the door in international policy spaces through the FSFW.
- Expose and challenge the FSFW's attempts to partner with governments and NGOs in addressing the epidemic the industry has driven.
- Advance Article 19 of the FCTC to hold the tobacco industry legally liable for the harms it has caused, and advance national-level policies to recoup the health care costs of the tobacco epidemic from Big Tobacco.

[general-and-executive-board-of-the-world-health-organization/](https://www.who.int/general-and-executive-board-of-the-world-health-organization/)

- 7 Aditya Kalra, Paritosh Bansal, Duff Wilson, Tom Lasseter. "Inside Philip Morris' campaign to subvert the global anti-smoking treaty." Reuters. July 13, 2017. Accessed May 7, 2019. <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/pmi-who-fctc/>
- 8 "The Philip Morris files." Thomson Reuters document cloud. Accessed May 7, 2019. <https://www.documentcloud.org/public/search/projectid:%2033738-the-philip-morris-files>
- 9 Jonathan Liberman. "The new Philip Morris-funded Foundation for a Smoke-Free World: independent or not?" McCabe Center for Law and Cancer. January 30, 2018. Accessed May 7, 2019. <https://untobaccocontrol.org/kh/legal-challenges/new-philip-morris-funded-foundation-smoke-free-world-independent-not/>
- 10 "WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control Secretariat's statement on the launch of the Foundation for a Smoke-Free World." WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. September 19, 2017. Accessed May 7, 2019. <https://www.who.int/fctc/mediacentre/statement/secretariat-statement-launch-foundation-for-a-smoke-free-world/en/>
- 11 "WHO Statement on Philip Morris funded Foundation for a Smoke-Free World." World Health Organization. September 26, 2017. Accessed May 7, 2019. <https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/28-09-2017-who-statement-on-philip-morris-funded-foundation-for-a-smoke-free-world>