

COUNTERING THE FOUNDATION FOR A SMOKE-FREE WORLD (FSFW)

How the Health Community Has Responded to the FSFW and What More Can Be Done

In September 2017, Philip Morris International (PMI) pledged about \$1 billion to the Foundation for a Smoke-Free World (FSFW), an organization that will provide grants for “medical, agricultural, and scientific research to end smoking and its health effects and to address the impact of reduced worldwide demand for tobacco.”¹

FSFW’s patron PMI is one of the largest transnational tobacco companies that manufactures and sells the world famous Marlboro brand and is currently introducing into many markets electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS), including e-cigarettes² and heated tobacco products like IQOS.³ FSFW’s research grants will include research on the novel products. Despite swimming in tobacco money, FSFW describes itself as “an independent, private foundation formed and operated free from the control or influence of any third party.”⁴ Furthermore, FSFW has been reportedly working with public relations and law firms linked to the tobacco industry.⁵ Its claim of “independence” was also [challenged for lack of sufficient governance safeguards to ensure autonomy](#) from its funder PMI.⁶

The global public health community expressed its sentiments unequivocally:

- a. **WHO:** Citing the UN General Assembly which has recognized a “fundamental conflict of interest between the tobacco industry and public health,” as well as [PMI’s relentless efforts to challenge tobacco control policy](#),⁷ WHO pronounced that there are a number of clear conflicts of interest involved with a tobacco company funding a purported health foundation, particularly if it promotes sale of tobacco and other products found in that company’s brand portfolio. It declared that it will not partner with FSFW and advised governments not to partner with the same.
- b. **WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control’s Secretariat (WHO FCTC):** The Convention Secretariat considers “[this tobacco industry-funded initiative as a clear attempt to breach the WHO FCTC](#) by interfering in public policy... aimed at damaging the treaty’s implementation, particularly through the Foundation’s contentious research programmes.”
- c. **World Conference on Tobacco or Health (WCTOH):** [WCTOH shunned all FSFW-affiliated persons from participating in the global public conference](#), and called on everyone to cease engagement with the Foundation.⁸
- d. **Public Health Community:** [Prominent universities in North America](#)⁹ and civil society groups, including those working internationally (e.g., [Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids](#), [International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease](#), [World Heart Federation](#), and [Southeast Asia Tobacco Control Alliance](#)), have condemned the duplicity of the scheme.
- e. **Governments:** Many governments have received word on the matter and have acted accordingly. While some rely on social media for the dissemination of the message, a few governments have reported that letters or memos have been issued to warn about FSFW in accordance with FCTC Article 5.3.

For instance, [Poland's Ministry of Health considers FSFW as part of the tobacco industry](#) and issued a letter warning all academic and research institutions to be wary of FSFW-funded research. Another example is [Vietnam's memo calling on the cabinet, local government, and mass organizations to coordinate the implementation of the WHO recommendation and to inform governments and health communities not to cooperate with FSFW](#) due to its fundamental conflict of interest with public health.

Treaty Obligations:

Early on, the tobacco control treaty recognized the need to be alert to tobacco industry strategies that undermine public health. FCTC Article 5.3 obliges governments to protect their public health policies from the commercial and vested interests of the tobacco industry. Its Guidelines point out that the foremost action to take is to monitor and raise awareness about the tobacco industry and its tactics. Well-meaning researchers and civil society groups may unwittingly end up with FSFW's tobacco funding and inadvertently influence government policies. Hence, preventive measures are more imminent than ever before.

Recommendations:

Learning from previous practices, **governments** may:

- a. Study more about FSFW, the people behind it, and the link [with ENDS which the tobacco industry is heavily investing in](#);
- b. Write a [letter to all research institutions, local governments, and other entities that may receive funding from FSFW](#);
- c. Issue a [memo alerting all government sectors](#) engaging in researchers, such as ministries of public information, trade, science and technology, social work, environment, finance, labor, and agriculture, as well as the academe, research agencies, and civil society groups; and,
- d. Publish or release to the media any letter or memo on the matter to ensure wider coverage.

Civil society, whose participation is deemed essential under the tobacco control treaty, can help:

- a. Monitor FSFW's movements in the society and provide governments with information on those representing FSFW and their activities; and,
- b. Raise awareness on FSFW and its tobacco industry links.

REFERENCES:

¹ Yach, Derek (19 March 2018). The state of smoking 2018: Global survey findings and insights. Foundation for a Smoke-Free World. Press Conference Presentation. Retrieved from <https://www.smokefreeworld.org/sites/default/files/uploads/derek-yach-press-conference-presentation.pdf> (accessed on 09 August 2018).

² Philip Morris International website. Taking e-cigarettes further: E-vapor products. Available at <https://www.pmi.com/smoke-free-products/mesh-taking-e-cigarettes-further> (accessed on 09 August 2018).

³ In preparing its research agenda, FSFW participated in the E-Cigarette Summit in London in November 2017, and has identified non-combustible forms of tobacco (e.g., snus, heat-not-burn, e-cigarettes) for its initial scoping work. – Foundation for a Smoke-Free World website, <https://www.smokefreeworld.org/> (accessed on 16 August 2018).

⁴ Yach, *supra* note 1.

⁵ Consultancies and law firms: Feinstein Kean Healthcare, Kantar Public, McKinsey, and Baker and Hostetler LLP. Retrieved from http://www.tobaccotactics.org/index.php?title=Foundation_for_a_Smoke-Free_World (accessed on 09 August 2018).

⁶ McCabe Center for Law and Cancer. New Philip Morris funded foundation for Smoke Free World: Independent or Not. Retrieved from <http://untobaccocontrol.org/kh/legal-challenges/new-philip-morris-funded-foundation-smoke-free-world-independent-not/> (accessed on 16 August 2018).

⁷ "Policies such as tobacco taxes, graphic warning labels, comprehensive bans on advertising, promotion and sponsorship, and offering help to quit tobacco use have been proven to reduce demand for tobacco products. These policies focus not just on helping existing users to quit, but on preventing initiation. If PMI were truly committed to a smoke-free world, the company would support these policies. Instead, PMI opposes them. PMI engages in large scale lobbying and prolonged and expensive litigation against evidence-based tobacco control policies." – WHO statement on Philip Morris funded Foundation for a Smoke-Free World. Retrieved from <http://www.who.int/news-room/detail/28-09-2017-who-statement-on-philip-morris-funded-foundation-for-a-smoke-free-world> (accessed on 16 August 2018).

⁸ "We urge governments, scientists, research entities, foundations, and civil society organizations to reject or cease engagement with the Philip Morris International-funded Foundation for a Smokefree World and other initiatives of the tobacco industry." – 17th World Conference on Tobacco or Health (WCTOH) 2018 Declarations. Retrieved from <https://www.wctoh.org/news/17th-wctoh-declarations-announced-at-conference-close/> (accessed on 16 August 2018).

⁹ See, for example, Harvard University – School of Public Health's Statement on the Foundation for a Smoke-Free World. Available at <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/deans-office/2018/01/26/smoke-free-world-letter/> (accessed on 09 August 2018).