

# DANGERS OF THE “UNSMOKE” CAMPAIGN

## Frequently Asked Questions

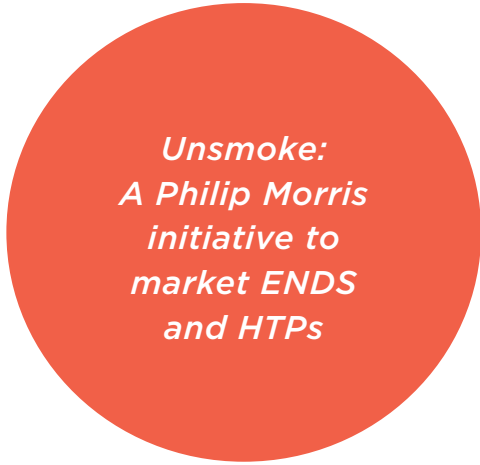
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## What is Philip Morris’s “Unsmoke” campaign?

On 08 April 2019, Philip Morris International (PMI) launched “The Year of Unsmoke”— a call for action to “smokers, nonsmokers, regulators and agents of change... who can empower a smoke-free future”, with a key message: “If you don’t smoke, don’t start. If you smoke, quit.

If you don’t quit, change”<sup>1</sup>

On 21 May 2019, PMI launched “It’s Time to Unsmoke” at Wall Street’s Future of Everything annual event. The initiative calls for authorities and regulators to “have an open conversation and come up with a meaningful solution on how we can Unsmoke the world.”



*Unsmoke:  
A Philip Morris  
initiative to  
market ENDS  
and HTPs*

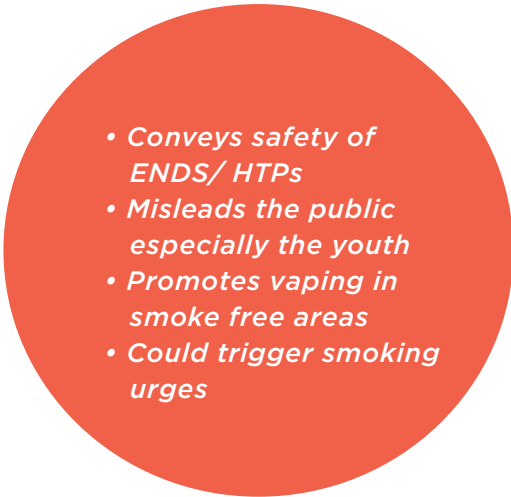
It is along the same lines of this so-called “corporate transformation” strategy that PMI funded the Foundation for a Smoke-Free World (FSFW) as part of the company’s corporate affairs strategy to shift from harmful combustible cigarettes to its new, so-called “less harmful” product line.<sup>2</sup> PMI, along with other tobacco transnationals, have been aggressively lobbying for the entry into the market of electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS) products and heated tobacco products (HTPs) (e.g., IQOS, TEEPS).<sup>3</sup>

The self-professed “socially responsible” activity in the form of Unsmoke campaign<sup>4</sup> is targeted to the public, not just to stockholders,<sup>5</sup> and complements the aggressive marketing of the tobacco company’s new products.<sup>6</sup>

## What is wrong with the Unsmoke campaign?

Consistent with this marketing ploy, the message of PMI’s Unsmoke campaign “If you cannot quit, change” creates an impression that “changing” instead of quitting is an equally safe option. While conveying “benefits of switching”, it fails to communicate the risks associated with the use of novel products, such as dual use,<sup>7</sup> sustained addiction,<sup>8</sup> and the threat of developing pulmonary and cardiovascular diseases, cancers, and other diseases over the long term.<sup>9</sup> It also fails to communicate that Unsmoke implies potentially promoting exposure to e-cigarette vapors in public places that are already declared smoke-free.

**Messages like “Unsmoke” which convey the safety of ENDS and HTPs, could mislead the public into thinking that the act of smoking electronic devices and being exposed to secondhand emissions are also safe.**

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- *Conveys safety of ENDS/ HTPs*
  - *Misleads the public especially the youth*
  - *Promotes vaping in smoke free areas*
  - *Could trigger smoking urges*

Despite the uncertainties about ENDS and HTPs as “harm reduced” alternatives, there is [consensus that children should be protected](#) from them.<sup>10</sup> Messages like “Unsmoke” which convey the safety of ENDS and HTPs, could mislead the public into thinking that the act of vaping/ smoking electronic devices and being exposed to secondhand vape/emissions are also safe. Notably, another source of harm is the way passive exposure to the use of these novel products could trigger strong smoking urges in young adults.<sup>11</sup> Particularly vulnerable to being misled are the youth who have no institutional memory of the [public deception employed by the tobacco industry](#).<sup>12</sup>

## On ENDS and HTPs

The long-term safety of ENDS<sup>13</sup> and HTPs<sup>14</sup> remains unknown and the evidence on their effectiveness to induce quitting is mixed;<sup>15</sup> yet, there is strong evidence of teen experimentation and addiction in nicotine devices.<sup>16 17</sup> One in five high school students in the United States currently uses e-cigarettes and this new epidemic has skyrocketed in the course of the last five years.<sup>18 19</sup> This demonstrates the vulnerability of school-age children to be lured into using these potentially harmful devices, with the risk to introduce them into the use of traditional tobacco products, such as cigarettes. E-cigarette flavors (e.g, mango, mint, fruit, and crème) were reported to have caused the rise in teenage use and have been subject to access restrictions in the US.<sup>20</sup> E-cigarette harms studies are plagued with uncertainties due to lack of long-term scientific research.<sup>21</sup> Despite studies showing secondhand emissions/vape are harmful,<sup>22</sup> the tobacco industry has exploited definitional loopholes, made use of lobbying tactics, and leveraged pro e-cigarette advocacy networks to oppose inclusion of e-cigarettes in smoke-free laws during policy debates.<sup>23</sup>

## What is the potential impact of such campaigns on the implementation of the WHO FCTC?

The fresh focus on Unsmoke marketing or the option of “switching” also distracts the public from the tobacco industry’s real intent to make profit;<sup>24</sup> and from the fact that the single most effective means of reducing smoking prevalence lies not with novel tobacco products, but with the comprehensive implementation of the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC or Convention). [Research](#) has shown that tobacco control measures implemented by Parties are most effective when they align with comprehensive implementation of the WHO FCTC and its Guidelines, including strengthening smoke-free laws, advertising restrictions, denouncing and protecting from tobacco industry tactics, and making the industry accountable for the harm it causes.<sup>25</sup>

*Distracts from and undermines progress in:*

- *smoke free laws*
- *advertising restrictions*
- *tax increases*
- *protecting against tobacco tactics*
- *making the tobacco industry accountable*

Among the poor and within a resource-strapped healthcare setting, [significant tax increases serve as the most cost-effective deterrent](#) to smoking;<sup>26</sup> and yet, tobacco companies like PMI continue to resist tax increases and to keep prices low while their products continue to be marketed in ways that appeal to children and youth.<sup>27</sup>

The tobacco industry, instead of being recognized as a “partner in public health” that it purports to be with the Unsmoke campaign, must be made to account for undermining tobacco control, including for the years of public deception employed. Furthermore, based on studies that show the potential of the ENDS and novel products to present future harms to its users, governments must consider adopting mechanisms that will ensure protection of consumers that will be harmed by the products as a result of misleading or enticing marketing done.

### Tobacco Control in SDGs

Cigarette is the only consumer product that, if used as intended, kills half of its consumers.<sup>28</sup> Tobacco-related deaths are at 8 million annually... far more people are killed by tobacco than by weapons,<sup>29</sup> natural disasters,<sup>30</sup> and road accidents<sup>31</sup> combined. The global community’s policy solution to the scourge is the WHO FCTC, a treaty ratified by 181 Parties,<sup>32</sup> embodying standards on smoke-free environments, smoking cessation, advertising bans, labelling and packaging, tobacco taxation, and tobacco industry liability, amongst other supply and demand measures.

Implementation of the WHO FCTC is embedded in the UN SDGs,<sup>33</sup> as a key goal to ensuring healthy lives for present and future generations<sup>34</sup>, as well as in accelerating attainment of the SDGs, such as those related to education, gender, labor, environment, agriculture/food, equity and justice, among others.<sup>35</sup>

The messaging involved in Unsmoke could mislead the public into thinking that tobacco or nicotine devices are just as safe as quitting. Because color is a visual marketing element that communicates through associated meanings,<sup>36</sup> Unsmoke’s pointed use of yellow and black, coupled with its name, is designed to resemble a safety warning, similar to most health warnings – to dissuade consumers from combustible cigarettes and steer them to “safer” alternatives.

Unsmoke also serves as a marketing tool for IQOS and ENDS products. PMI’s white IQOS conveys an impression of being clean and fresh,<sup>37</sup> similar to its white pack of Marlboro Gold Lights cigarette conveying an impression of being less harmful than other cigarettes. Even PMI’s own scientists recently pointed out that describing IQOS as a “less harm” product is inaccurate because PMI studies concluded that HTPs/IQOS produced less toxins, but that does not prove that HTP/IQOS is less harmful to health.<sup>38</sup> Recent studies indicate that IQOS are no less harmful than conventional cigarettes.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, PMI’s own studies suggest that the introduction of IQOS could lead to adolescent and young non-users initiating tobacco use with IQOS.<sup>40</sup>

Marketing e-cigarettes and novel tobacco products as “safer” without warning about the attenuating risks to teen addiction and long-term harms can be compared to [an era when the public was led to believe that “light” and “mild” cigarettes were safer](#) and were a genuine alternative to quitting.<sup>41 42</sup>

## What actions in line with WHO FCTC can be taken to counter the Unsmoke marketing tactic?

Misleading messages of the tobacco industry need to be clarified. Unsmoke and related so-called “corporate transformation” campaigns could undermine tobacco advertising, promotion, and sponsorship (TAPS) bans that are in place in many countries. Governments need to prevent any misleading information directed to consumers, consistent with Article 13 of the WHO FCTC, and must be prepared to hold the tobacco industry accountable for harms caused by its misleading information, in line with Article 19. Based on Article 5.3 Guidelines, so-called socially responsible activity of asking people to “switch” from traditional to new tobacco products must be exposed as another tobacco industry tactic and de-normalized.<sup>43</sup>

Guidelines for implementation Article 12 remind Parties of their duty to educate, communicate with and train people to ensure high level of public awareness of tobacco control, the harm of tobacco production, consumption and exposure to tobacco smoke, and the strategies and practices of the tobacco industry to undermine tobacco control efforts, as well as on the benefits of cessation of tobacco use (Article 14) and of living a tobacco-free life.

The links between the PMI’s Unsmoke campaign and the Foundation for a Smoke Free World (FSFW) must be exposed. The FSFW, through its grant system, could potentially spawn new tobacco industry allies to obfuscate science and confuse governments to the detriment of attained public health and development gains.

- *Enforce Advertising Restrictions*
- *Prevent Tobacco Industry Interference*
- *Strengthen Enforcement of Smoke-Free Laws*
- *Increase Tobacco Taxes*
- *Make the Tobacco Industry Accountable*

### **Guidelines for the implementation of Article 5.3 of the WHO FCTC**

Article 5.3 of the Convention requires its members (Parties) to protect their public health measures from the commercial and vested interests of the tobacco industry.<sup>44</sup> The Guidelines for implementation of Article 5.3 of the Convention recommend that Parties raise awareness about the tobacco industry tactics, reject partnerships and avoid conflicts of interest with the tobacco industry, prevent it from interfering in the development and implementation of policies related to tobacco control, require it to provide information, de-normalize, and regulate activities it describes as “socially responsible”, and not to give it any privileges or benefits to run its business.<sup>45</sup>

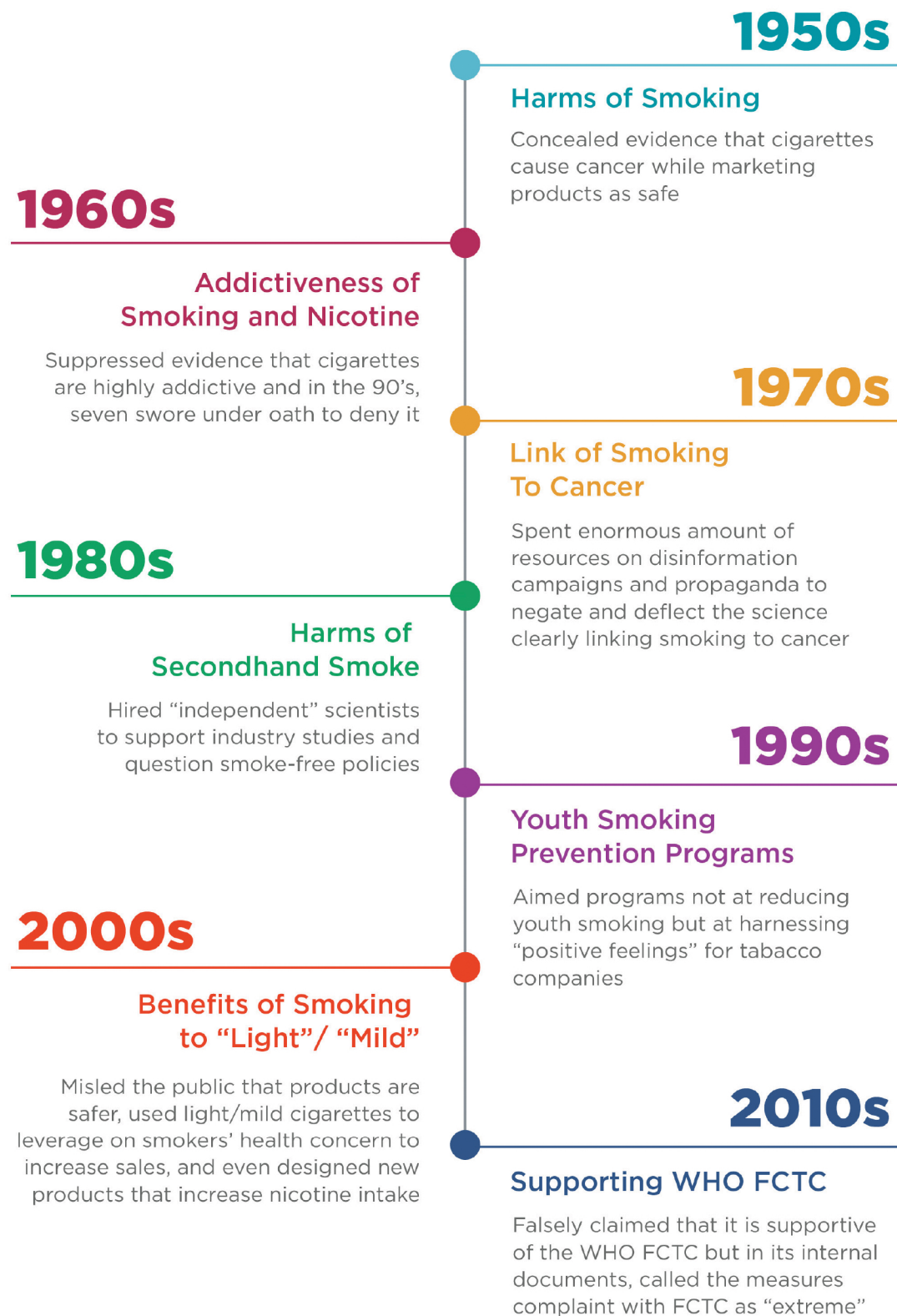
### **Tobacco Industry’s Targeting of Children, especially in Developing Countries**

Despite the tobacco industry’s insistence that it does not market to children, there is a long history of its marketing to youth and of public deception which remains unaccounted for. Internal documents show that the tobacco industry knew that over 90% of smokers started when they were young,<sup>46</sup> and targeted kids as replacement smokers.<sup>47</sup> The tobacco industry’s “youth smoking prevention programs”, done as part of so-called corporate social responsibility (CSR), were “ineffective or serve(d) to promote smoking among youth”.<sup>48</sup> For example, Philip Morris’ “Think. Don’t Smoke”,<sup>49</sup> a youth anti-smoking campaign in the 1990s, was aimed, not at preventing youth smoking, but to harness “positive feelings” towards the tobacco industry.<sup>50 51</sup>

Until the present, in developing countries like Bangladesh, Indonesia and the Philippines,<sup>52 53</sup> cigarettes are advertised and sold near schools; cigarettes are sold in single-stick or kiddie packs which are affordable to kids; and cigarette brands are displayed alongside sweets and candies.<sup>54</sup> The same pattern can be seen in the electronic tobacco/nicotine devices. Tobacco companies have been shown to target teens with candy- and fruit-flavored e-cigarette liquid.<sup>55</sup> In Southeast Asian countries, e-cigarettes were found to come in candy flavors, and displayed along with novelty products that attract the youth.<sup>56</sup>

It bears stressing that PMI claims that it wants to stop selling cigarettes and aims for a “smoke-free world”,<sup>57</sup> but contrary to this position, its cigarettes continue to be heavily marketed in ways that attract children<sup>58</sup>, and it continues to fight smoke-free and other tobacco control policies in order to increase its business.<sup>59</sup> For instance, in Indonesia, a country that has a high smoking prevalence among the youth (20.3%), PMI recently launched a new brand of regular cigarettes.<sup>60</sup> In the Philippines, PMI sued a local government for adopting a pro-youth ordinance adopting a tobacco-free campus town;<sup>61</sup> while in India, the PMI affiliate challenged packages’ health warnings.<sup>62</sup>

# Tobacco Companies' Timeline of Public Deception



*For decades, the tobacco industry has deceived the public for purposes of gaining more profit.*

# Recommendations

The best defense of governments is to undertake evidence-based measures required under the WHO FCTC, with particular focus on strengthening smoke-free laws, advertising restrictions, preventing and denouncing tobacco industry tactics, and making the industry accountable.

## 1

### Enforce Advertising Restrictions

Current advertising restrictions on tobacco products can be made to apply to the Unsmoke campaign to prevent confusion among the public, especially the youth. In places where there is no clear advertising ban, countries should prohibit PMI from all forms of advertising and promotion of its ENDS or novel tobacco products, including its “The Year of Unsmoke” campaign, on the ground that it [is false, misleading](#)<sup>63</sup> or deceptive, or likely [to create an erroneous impression](#)<sup>64</sup> about its characteristics, health effects, hazards or emissions”.<sup>65</sup>

## 2

### Prevent Tobacco Industry Interference

Governments must take measures [to warn government agencies](#) and the public about tobacco industry tactics, and to [avoid partnerships being offered by the industry under the guise of “corporate transformation”](#) and “Unsmoke”, as these are all part of its so-called CSR and marketing initiatives.<sup>66</sup>

To facilitate monitoring and regulation, WHO FCTC Parties, in accordance with the Article 5.3 Guidelines, should require the tobacco industry to provide information on its marketing expenditures as well as on lobbying, philanthropy, political contributions and all other activities not prohibited under [Article 13 of the Convention](#).<sup>67</sup> This could include, if appropriate, corporate affairs strategies, including those to be carried out by third parties contracted on behalf of or for its benefit, such as the Foundation for a Smoke Free World. Governments must be informed of researchers linked with the tobacco industry and establish measures to ensure that such research outputs are not used to influence policy making.

In accordance with the treaty obligation to protect public health policies against the tobacco industry’s commercial and vested interests, governments must be particularly wary of alternatives espoused by the tobacco industry. For any proposal by the tobacco industry or those working to further its interest, the tobacco industry must bear the burden and cost of proving its case while the government must promote transparency, avoid conflict of interests, and uphold public health interests.



### 3

#### Strengthen Enforcement of Smoke-Free Laws

Governments must resist the pushback from the tobacco industry trying to weaken smoke-free laws to allow public vaping/ smoking of electronic or heated tobacco products. In accordance with the Article 5.3 Guidelines, [Parties should not accept, support or endorse any offer for assistance or proposed tobacco control legislation or policy drafted by or in collaboration with the tobacco industry.](#)<sup>68</sup> Governments should take the opportunity to strengthen their implementation of [Article 8 of the Convention](#)<sup>69</sup> and adopt a gold standard for 100% smoke-free places and/or reinforce the message on the benefits of going completely smoke-free, while reminding the public that smoke-free legislation should cover bans on public vaping/ smoking of devices in order to protect the population from their emissions.<sup>70</sup>

### 4

#### Increase Tobacco Taxes

Governments should use taxation as a key tool to reduce smoking prevalence, and take the opportunity to test the “corporate transformation” rhetoric by increasing tobacco taxes significantly in accordance with [Article 6 of the Convention and its Guidelines](#).<sup>71</sup> The increase in revenues from tobacco taxes could serve to compensate for tobacco use harms and to fund tobacco control activities (e.g, through dedication of a portion of tobacco taxes), including for actions to counter the tobacco industry’s continuing efforts to undermine tobacco control.

### 5

#### Make the Tobacco Industry Accountable

Governments must fast-track resolving issues related to liability and to take account of the work done in other jurisdictions, as well as “appropriate international approaches” to liability. Tobacco products result in a net loss for the world economy.<sup>72</sup> The economic costs of tobacco are [determinable](#) and can be collected from the tobacco industry.<sup>73</sup>

While one aspect of accountability is to fully explore litigation to ensure that the tobacco industry pays for past harms, another is to ensure that it will be accountable for future harms, in line with [Article 19 of the WHO FCTC](#).<sup>74</sup> Global health norms require safety standards in consumer products; the presence of risk in drug delivery devices like ENDS/HTPs calls for stringent regulation, including product recalls, and other accountability measures under product liability regimes. Governments must consider public health policies to protect consumers against future harms resulting from the tobacco industry’s introduction of unsafe products.

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## Acknowledgement and Authorship

This brief was prepared by the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) Secretariat's Knowledge Hub for Article 5.3, at the Global Center for Good Governance in Tobacco Control (GGTC) with support from the Bloomberg Philanthropies' Stopping Tobacco Organizations and Products (STOP). We acknowledge the technical input provided by Dr. Tibor Szilagyi and Leticia Martinez Lopez from the Secretariat of the WHO FCTC and the overall inputs from Jennifer Ellis, Adrienne Pizatella and Jein Weinberg of Bloomberg Philanthropies. We are also thankful for contributions provided by the Tobacco Control Research Group at the University of Bath, The Union's Department of Tobacco Control, and Vital Strategies to an earlier draft.

*Global Center for Good Governance in Tobacco Control (GGTC) aims to address the single greatest obstacle to tobacco control, tobacco industry interference. It is a joint initiative of the School of Global Studies, Thammasat University and Southeast Asia Tobacco Control Alliance (SEATCA) and has been designated as the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control Secretariat's Knowledge Hub for Article 5.3, (treaty provision on countering tobacco industry interference). GGTC is also a key partner of the Bloomberg Philanthropies' Stopping Tobacco Organizations and Products (STOP).*

*Stopping Tobacco Organizations and Products (STOP) is a global tobacco industry watchdog whose mission is to expose the tobacco industry strategies and tactics that undermine public health. STOP is funded by Bloomberg Philanthropies ([www.bloomberg.org](http://www.bloomberg.org)) and is a partnership among The Global Center for Good Governance in Tobacco Control, The Tobacco Control Research Group at the University of Bath, The Union's Department of Tobacco Control and Vital Strategies.*