TOBACCO INDUSTRY INTERFERENCE

Tobacco use continues to be the leading global cause of preventable death. It kills nearly 6 million people every year through cancer, heart disease, respiratory diseases, childhood diseases and others. It also causes hundreds of billions of dollars of economic losses worldwide every year. Over the course of the 21st century, tobacco use could kill up to a billion people unless urgent action is taken. The action we need to take is laid out in the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC). So far, 173 nations (plus the European Union) have pledged to work together to implement the Convention. However, these tobacco control efforts are systematically opposed by the tobacco industry. In its efforts to derail or weaken strong tobacco control policies, tobacco industry interference takes many forms. These include:

1. **Manoeuvering to hijack the political and legislative process**
   The tobacco industry has been highly resourceful in undermining governments’ efforts to protect public health. Tobacco companies have become expert in creating and exploiting legislative loopholes and manoeuvering with lobbyists to effectively influence law-making.

2. **Exaggerating the economic importance of the industry**
   Employment, tax contributions and other economic indicators are frequently used by the tobacco industry to demonstrate their contribution to the economy of a country. But the figures provided by the companies do not only exaggerate the economic importance of the industry but also ignore the social, environmental and health costs caused by tobacco and tobacco products.

3. **Manipulating public opinion to gain the appearance of respectability**
   Tobacco kills - but the tobacco industry has developed a range of tricks to manipulate public opinion. By investing funds in youth programmes or unrelated social causes, such as disaster relief and nature conservation groups, tobacco companies shift the focus away from their deadly products and gain a veneer of social respectability.
4. Fabricating support through front groups

Due to its isolation, the tobacco industry needs to simulate support. The tobacco industry creates and uses phony “grassroots” groups that support its interests. Typically, these groups focus on individual freedom; the alleged economic damage caused by smoke-free policies or feigned controversy about second-hand smoke.

5. Discrediting proven science

Sowing the seeds of doubt on the scientific evidence about the harm caused by tobacco and second-hand smoke is a popular tactic used by the tobacco industry. In order to weaken tobacco control legislation, the industry sparks controversy to distract and confuse the public and governments.

6. Intimidating governments with litigation or the threat of litigation

Threats of legal action are a popular tactic to intimidate governments that introduce effective tobacco control policies. As domestic courts, based on the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, increasingly rule against the tobacco industry in cases brought against governments, the companies use bilateral and trade agreements to pursue states in international courts. The aim: to deter other countries from introducing effective tobacco control measures.

Countries that are Parties to the WHO FCTC have committed themselves to overcoming tobacco industry interference by implementing Article 5.3 of the treaty, which states that “In setting and implementing their public health policies with respect to tobacco control, Parties shall act to protect these policies from commercial and other vested interests of the tobacco industry in accordance with national law.” All the Parties to the WHO FCTC have agreed on ways to stop tobacco industry interference based on four principles:

- There is a fundamental and irreconcilable conflict between the tobacco industry’s interests and public health policy interests.
- Parties, when dealing with the tobacco industry or those working to further its interests, should be accountable and transparent.
- Parties should require the tobacco industry and those working to further its interests to operate and act in a manner that is accountable and transparent.
- Because their products are lethal, the tobacco industry should not be granted incentives to establish or run their businesses.