

Closing remarks
Tobacco industry and corruption
6 May 2021

On behalf of GGTC, a partner of STOP, I would like to thank our speakers for improving our understanding of the link between tobacco industry and corruption. Governments have long agreed that the tobacco industry is powerful and influential, and its policy interference is widespread and well-documented. Civil society and investigative reporters have ceaselessly attempted to expose how the tobacco industry's money and influence have led to an irrational watering down of policies; but as with all corruption issues, it has always been a struggle to find the link. Did money change hands? Was there undue influence? Who was involved? When did that power and influence turn into acts of corruption?

Because this is outside the public health's comfort zone, this would remain speculation in many instances. But on rare occasions, there would be evidence, brought to us by a brave whistleblower, a passionate investigative reporter, or an uncompromising policy maker. Today, we celebrate these warriors for bringing the corruption stories to light and today, we honor them. And as we wish for their tribe to grow, we must also do more than just listen to the stories, we need to make these stories count.

Share. Making these stories count involves amplifying the truth about the tobacco industry and corruption. The public health and development community does not have the machinery to counter the tobacco industry's elegant public relations strategy to dress itself up and deceive the public in order to sell more of its products; but the global community is equipped with the truths that have been spoken by the brave warriors we honor today. Regardless of where we are, and where the corruption took place, we are part of a global community that can counter the tobacco industry's public relations tactics by sharing the truth about tobacco industry and corruption.

Investigate. In any country that is affected, or where the company operates, or where something similar could be happening; we must urge governments to investigate further and prosecute. Stories of corruption by transnationals in foreign countries should not remain foreign in our own countries. Transnationals essentially work under one corporate umbrella. Its practices in one country have wide ranging impact in many others: For instance, when a tobacco company uses bribery to undermine tobacco control policies, it can lead to smuggling which affects a web of syndicates, it can lead to cross-border advertising undermining health policies in other jurisdictions, it can set a low standard of health protection in the whole region, a race to the bottom; it can undermine efforts to combat corruption not only in the country where bribery took place but also in the country where the company is headquartered.

Implement. Practically every country that has ratified the FCTC has ratified the UN Convention Against Corruption. Almost every country has some form of infrastructure to fight corruption. Based on a general obligation Art 5.3, WHO FCTC Parties are urged Limit interaction and avoid conflicts of interests with the tobacco industry, reject its offers of partnerships or contributions, denormalize its CSR, and do not give it any benefits to run its business. If we combine anti-corruption infrastructure to preserve integrity, with efforts to implement Article 5.3; we can significantly weaken the ability of the tobacco industry to use undue influence and corruption to undermine life-saving measures.

As the world continues to struggle with COVID-19 and its economic and health impact, saving lives and the economy from the clutches of the tobacco industry has become even more important. There has been no better time to increase tobacco taxes to reduce tobacco use and

increase revenues. It has never been more crucial to stop the tobacco industry from marketing new forms of addiction to a younger generation. And we can only do this by stopping tobacco industry interference and ending tobacco industry corruption.

Save lives.

Share the truth.

Investigate the tobacco companies.

Implement Art 5.3 of the WHO FCTC and UNCAC.

GGTC, as a partner of STOP, a global tobacco watchdog, will continue to work on this issue and provide any assistance to those who need it.

Thank you.