28th January 2019

To the Director General and Executive Board of the World Health Organization,

We write to you, as members of the global public health community, to express our grave concern at the attempt by the Philip Morris International-funded entity, Foundation for a Smoke Free World (FSFW), to pave the road for partnership with the World Health Organization (WHO).

Giving any consideration to an organization that is entirely funded by the tobacco industry would fundamentally undermine the significant health and policy gains made to date on the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and prevention of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) through the implementation of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC). It would specifically undermine WHO FCTC Article 5.3 which seeks to protect public health policies from the vested interests of the tobacco industry and on which much of the success of the treaty rests.

We therefore call on you to reject this approach, in the strongest terms, and reinforce WHO’s 2017 notice to governments and the public health community to reject any affiliation with FSFW because of the “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.”

Analysis of leaked PMI corporate affairs documents suggests that the establishment of the FSFW is consistent with the company’s corporate strategy. The concern is that FSFW effectively operationalizes PMI’s corporate affairs strategy to further PMI’s business interests which include the promotion of its heated tobacco products, a market which PMI seeks to dominate. While PMI and its grantee claim a commitment to reducing harm; reports show that PMI’s cigarettes continue to be heavily marketed in ways that attract children and undermine public health policy.

We are secure in the knowledge that the WHO does not engage with the tobacco industry or its proxies. We trust that you will respond to the PMI-funded FSFW in a manner consistent with the institution’s long-standing principles to protect its credibility and integrity bearing in mind that legitimising FSFW through engagement would simply advance PMI’s agenda to the detriment of global health.

In the spirit of promoting partnerships to attain the SDGs, we hope that you will take this opportunity to establish WHO’s leadership in implementing the Model policy for agencies of the United Nations system on preventing tobacco industry interference.

The health of millions of people requires no less.

Signed,

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