

Return to sender: Rejecting PMI Ukraine's charity during COVID-19

Although sponsorship activities by tobacco companies are banned in Ukraine, Philip Morris International (PM) found a way to donate funds to the government during the COVID-19 pandemic. In February, PMI Ukraine donated 10 million UAH (372,577 USD) to the Charity Fund Health for All to help fight the pandemic according to a report by [American Chamber of Commerce](#) (ACC) and news agency [Unian](#) website. Quick action by local tobacco control advocates resulted in the donation being rejected.

Health for All that facilitated the donation is a high-profile NGO well known by the government. The head of the foundation, Serhiy Shevchuk, said, "We are keeping constant contact with the Ministry of Health and Office of the President to allocate funds as efficiently as possible. According to preliminary estimates, a significant part will be spent on the purchase of personal protective equipment for doctors. The remainder will be reserved for emergency needs of hospitals at the time of the epidemic outbreak." In his statement Serhiy Shevchuk expressed gratitude to "Philip Morris Ukraine for their support and, in turn, we guarantee the purchase and transfer to the hospitals of the most necessary protective equipment in the nearest future."

According to Article 13 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), tobacco related corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities are a form of sponsorship and should be banned. As a Party to the FCTC, Ukraine has already banned tobacco sponsored activities.

Local NGO, Advocacy Center LIFE, launched a campaign exposing why this donation breaks the law and urged the Ministry of Health and the Office of the President to reject any partnership and donations from the tobacco industry. Their actions include the following:

- Advocacy Center LIFE informed the Ministry of Health about the PMI donation and provided the justification that PMI Ukraine has violated the national tobacco control law 2899 by giving charitable contributions to Health for All.
- On April 2, LIFE published a [statement "On the inadmissibility of bleaching the reputation of tobacco corporations by government agencies."](#) This statement highlighted that Serhiy Shevchuk, a tobacco lobbyist, ex-MP, the Head of Health for All Foundation has been receiving charitable contributions from PMI annually since **2013**. In 2005, Serhiy Shevchuk, who was then the State Secretary for the Ministry of Health, had tried to [block the adoption of the first national tobacco control legislation](#).
- In a press statement, LIFE urged the Ministry of Health and the Office of the President to reject the donation from Health for All because it violates Ukraine's law 2899 which prohibits tobacco sponsorship. Accepting the donation from PMI Ukraine would also contravene FCTC [Article 5.3](#) which calls on Governments to protect their public health policy from the commercial and vested interests of the tobacco industry, and this involves denormalizing so-called CSR activities of the tobacco industry.

- LIFE sent complaint letters to the Ministry of Health, the Office of the President, the Prime Minister and the State Enforcement Agency urging them to take action on the violation of the law and called on the Government to reject any partnership and accepting donations from the tobacco industry.

Acting on LIFE's inquiry, a Member of the Parliament sent a letter to the Prime Minister, Mr Shmygal about the inadmissibility of cooperation with the tobacco industry.

Following this, both the Ministry of Health and the Office of the president confirmed that there was no official communication from the government with *Health for All* about any cooperation or acceptance of donation from PMI Ukraine to fight COVID-19.

Following an alert from LIFE, one of the top newspapers Kyiv Post investigated how the tobacco industry is exploiting the COVID-19 pandemic to build the relationship with decision makers. [The investigation](#) confirmed that the Ministry of Health and the Office of the President rejected the donation from PMI Ukraine.