Southeast Asia Tobacco Control Alliance

7 April 2025, World Health Day

To: **Member States of the World Health Organization (WHO)**

Through:

Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus
Director-General, World Health Organization
Avenue Appia 20, 1211 Geneva
Switzerland

Subject: **Rescind the Nomination of the Philippines to the WHA Presidency**

Dear Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus and Distinguished WHO Member States,

We write to you as public health advocates and tobacco control organizations to express our deep concern regarding the nomination of the Philippines to preside over the 78th World Health Assembly (WHA). While we recognize past contributions of the Philippines to global health, recent actions of the Philippine government, including its current Health Secretary, Dr. Teodoro Herbosa, cast serious doubts on the capacity of the Philippine government to uphold the integrity and principles that the World Health Organization (WHO) and the WHA stand for.

On 20 March 2025, Dr. Herbosa, First Lady Liza Marcos, and Social Welfare Secretary Rex Gatchalian joined executives of Philip Morris International (PMI) and its Philippine affiliate Philip Morris Fortune Tobacco Corporation (PMFTC) in a formal donation ceremony in Malacañang Palace during which the PMI chief executive officer spoke and turned over four mobile clinics to the government.[1,2] Alarmingly, this is not the first instance of such behavior. Dr. Herbosa, Mrs. Marcos, and Sec. Gatchalian were photographed several months ago with a PMFTC executive when the government also received a donation of a mobile clinic from the tobacco company.[3,4]

These actions – at the Presidential Palace no less – not only contradict the Philippine government's commitment to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), to which the country is a Party, but also violate the Civil Service Commission-Department of Health Joint Memorandum Circular (CSC-DOH JMC) 2010-01, based on WHO FCTC Article 5.3. The JMC explicitly prohibits government officials from engaging in unnecessary interactions with, or receiving donations from, the tobacco industry. Such repeated breaches compromise the impartiality and credibility required to lead the world's foremost health policymaking body.

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[1] Liza Marcos Instagram photo, 21 March 2025 (https://www.instagram.com/p/DHdcOutTdHf/) and Liza Marcos Facebook video, 21 March 2025 (https://www.facebook.com/fl.lizamarcos/videos/2200398483690370)
[2] Department of Social Welfare and Development Philippines Facebook photo, 22 March 2025 (https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1068366218648332&set=pcb.1068366305314990)
[3] Quezon City Government Facebook photo, 1 August 2024 (https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=804874378493870&id=100069139452704&set=a.163656892615625)
[4] Inquirer.net, 'DSWD hit for accepting tobacco firm's donations,' Available at https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1971731/dswd-hit-for-accepting-tobacco-firms-donations

The WHO FCTC Article 5.3 Implementation Guidelines explicitly recognize that there is a fundamental and irreconcilable conflict between the tobacco industry's interests and public health policy interests. The WHO has also clearly stated that there is an inherent contradiction between the tobacco industry and corporate social responsibility (CSR).[5] The tobacco industry's so-called CSR efforts, including donations of medical equipment, are widely recognized as strategies to divert public attention from the industry's role in causing millions of preventable deaths and diseases.[6]

The active participation and applause of the Health Secretary legitimize these deceptive industry tactics and undermine public trust in public health institutions tasked with protecting citizens from tobacco harms and nicotine addiction. Furthermore, this legitimization of the tobacco industry gives it undue influence over policymaking, undermining public health regulations to limit the devastating impact of tobacco on public health.

This influence has been palpable at recent sessions of the WHO FCTC Conference of Parties (COP), where industry-aligned positions and actions of the Philippine delegation disrupted and delayed proceedings and earned the country three Dirty Ashtray awards from the Global Alliance for Tobacco Control at COP9 and a fifth Dirty Ashtray award at COP10. The fifth Ashtray award generated significant domestic and international media attention and led to the conduct of Senate Blue Ribbon Committee hearings to investigate the delegation's actions.

Nominating and electing a Health Secretary from a country that has repeatedly breached clearly-defined ethical standards to preside over the WHA risks not only damaging the reputation of WHO and the WHA but also diluting rather than strengthening global policies for promotion of public health and its protection from commercial determinants of health.

Given these circumstances, we urge the WHO and its Member States to rescind the nomination of the Philippines for the WHA presidency. We must ensure that the leadership of the WHA embodies the highest standards of integrity and aligns with WHO's mission to promote health, keep the world safe, and serve the vulnerable, aiming for a world where all people attain the highest possible level of health.

Respectfully,

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Southeast Asia Tobacco Control Alliance (SEATCA)
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[Co-signatories on next page]

[5] World Health Organization. 2004. Tobacco Industry and Corporate Responsibility…an Inherent Contradiction. Available at https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6kf7q7v9
[6] Southeast Asia Tobacco Control Alliance. 2024. Unmasking Influence: How the Tobacco Industry Leverages Donations to Shape Policy in ASEAN. Available at https://seatca.org/dmdocuments/CSR%20Report%202024.pdf

Southeast Asia Tobacco Control Alliance

Co-signatories: (*additional 11 signatories as of 7 May 2025)

Action on Smoking & Health (USA)
Action on Smoking & Health (Canada)
Action on Smoking and Health, Scotland
Action on Smoking and Health Foundation, Thailand
African Tobacco Control Alliance
Alcohol and Drug Information Centre (Sri Lanka)
Alliance Contre Le Tabac (France)
Asian Consultancy on Tobacco Control (Hong Kong SAR)*
Australian Council on Smoking & Health*
Austrian Council on Smoking and Health
Cambodia Movement for Health
Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids
Cancer Council Australia
Centro para la Defensa del Consumidor (El Salvador)*
Coalicion America Saludable
Coalicion Mexico Salud-Hable*
Coalition for People's Right to Health (Philippines)
Comite Interinstitucional para la Lucha contra el Tabaco (Mexico)*
Comite National Contre Le Tamagisme (France)
Corporate Accountability
Costa Rica Saludable*
Council for Health & Development (Philippines)
Dhaka Ahsania Mission
Drug Fight Malawi
European Network for Smoking and Tobacco Prevention
FCTC Implementation and Monitoring Center (Georgia)
Federacion Argentina de Graduados en Nutricion*
Fresh (UK)
Global Alliance for Tobacco Control
Healthy Caribbean Coalition
Heart Foundation of Jamaica
Indonesia Health Policy Forum (RUKKI)
Initiative for Public Health Research and Communication (Bangladesh)
InterAmerican Heart Foundation
International Network of Women Against Tobacco
International Union for Health Promotion and Education*
Jamaica Coalition for Tobacco Control
Jeewaka Foundation (Sri Lanka)
King Hussein Cancer Center
Korea Center for Tobacco Control Research and Education
Ligue Senegalaise Conte Le Tabac
Lung Foundation Australia
Malaysian Green Lung Association
Malaysian Women's Action for Tobacco Control and Health

(Thailand)
(Sri Lanka)
(France)
(Hong Kong SAR)
(Cambodia)
(Philippines)
(France)
(Council for Health & Development, Philippines)
(Bangladesh)
(FCTC Implementation and Monitoring Center, Georgia)
(UK)

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Movendi International*
Norwegian Cancer Society
Organizacion Multidisiplinaria para la Integracion Social (Uruguay)
Parents Against Vape (Philippines)
Philippine Pediatric Society
Philippine Smoke-Free Movement
Physicians for a Smoke-Free Canada*
Pratyasha Anti-Drugs Club (Bangladesh)
PROGGA Knowledge for Progress (Bangladesh)
Slovenian Coalition for Public Health, Environment and Tobacco Control
Smoke-free Air For Everyone (USA)
Smoke-free Israel
Swiss Association for Tobacco Control
Tanzania Tobacco Control Forum
Tobacco-Free Advocacy Japan*
Tobacco-Free Association of Zambia
Tobacco-Free Jordan
Uganda National Health Consumers' Organisation
Vision for Accelerated Sustainable Development, Ghana*
World Obesity Federation

(Bangladesh)

(Uruguay)

(Philippines)

(Bangladesh)

(Bangladesh)

(Israel)

(USA)

(Zambia)

(Tobacco-Free Jordan)

(Uganda)

(Jeewaka Foundation, Sri Lanka)