

Red Cross Red Crescent non-engagement with tobacco companies

Internal guidance brief – June 2015



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The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is the world's largest volunteer-based humanitarian network. Together with our 189 member National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies worldwide, we reach 97 million people annually through long-term services and development programmes as well as 85 million people through disaster response and early recovery programmes. We act before, during and after disasters and health emergencies to meet the needs and improve the lives of vulnerable people. We do so with impartiality as to nationality, race, gender, religious beliefs, class and political opinions.

Guided by *Strategy 2020* – our collective plan of action to tackle the major humanitarian and development challenges of this decade – we are committed to ‘saving lives and changing minds’.

Our strength lies in our volunteer network, our community-based expertise and our independence and neutrality. We work to improve humanitarian standards, as partners in development and in response to disasters. We persuade decision-makers to act at all times in the interests of vulnerable people.

The result: we enable healthy and safe communities, reduce vulnerabilities, strengthen resilience and foster a culture of peace around the world.

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with tobacco companies**
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Red Cross and Red Crescent (RCRC) National Societies (NSs) are urged to neither engage in partnerships with nor accept funding from the tobacco industry. The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (herein Movement) agreed, at the Council of Delegates in 2005, to not engage in partnerships with tobacco companies. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) Governing Board in 2013 strongly urged National Societies to refrain from taking tobacco industry donations.

Although each National Society has its own policy, this note aims to provide a briefing to inform and support National Societies as they address this issue and to encourage them to take appropriate action in this regard. Such action is urgent in view of the Movement's deep concern not to be associated with an industry that brings to market a product – tobacco – that continues to cause enormous public health damage, killing some 6 million people each year. Deaths from tobacco-related diseases exceed the number of people killed by weapons, natural disasters and road accidents combined. Increasingly, tobacco also contributes to health inequality: 80 per cent of victims of health damage from tobacco are from low and middle-income countries. Public health leaders have also denounced the public relations apparatus of the tobacco industry, that is known to “use its philanthropy to create an illusion that tobacco is just an ordinary consumer product, rather than a deadly product that kills up to half of its regular users when consumed exactly as the manufacturer intends” (WHO).

FACTS AND FIGURES ABOUT TOBACCO

TOBACCO KILLS
6 MILLION
PEOPLE EACH YEAR,
AT THE RATE OF ONE PERSON EVERY
SIX SECONDS. THIS IS MORE THAN
THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE KILLED BY WEAPONS, NATURAL
DISASTERS AND ROAD ACCIDENTS COMBINED.

THE VICTIMS INCLUDE OVER **600,000**
NON-SMOKERS, KILLED EACH YEAR BY
SECONDHAND SMOKE. OF WHOM
28 PER CENT
ARE **CHILDREN**.

TOBACCO FEEDS HEALTH INEQUALITY:
80 PER CENT
OF ITS VICTIMS ARE FROM **LOW-
AND MIDDLE-INCOME COUNTRIES**. IN HIGH-INCOME
COUNTRIES, IT AFFECTS THE POOR
DISPROPORTIONATELY.

FOR EVERY DEATH CAUSED BY TOBACCO, THE
TOBACCO INDUSTRY EARNS
6,000
US DOLLARS OF PROFIT.

TOBACCO USE IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DEATH
OF ABOUT
ONE IN TEN ADULTS
WORLDWIDE, CONTRIBUTING TO CARDIOVASCULAR
DISEASE, CHRONIC OBSTRUCTIVE RESPIRATORY
LUNG DISEASES AND LUNG CANCERS, DIABETES AND
OTHER DISEASES, TOBACCO BEING THE PRODUCT OF
A SINGLE ORGANIZED INDUSTRY.

1. Ethical framework

When faced with a compelling major disaster or humanitarian emergency and with limited resources, the RCRC may be focused on the immediate needs and may not think twice, about accepting readily available funds from tobacco industry corporations. However, accepting such funds fails to respect the guidance provided by the IFRC Governing Board, which protects the collective interests of National Societies.

But at the core of this guidance, what are the ethical concerns? The issue can be complex and differing views debated within National Societies. For example, some National Societies work in a context in which they provide a service by transmitting cash funding destined for beneficiaries in disaster-affected vulnerable communities without any funding being used by the National Society itself. This may pose a dilemma for such National Societies whether to substitute their own policies in place of the views of the beneficiaries themselves. Notwithstanding the challenges of resources for emergency response, overriding ethical imperatives have led the Movement and the Federation to take measures to uphold RCRC principles and to distance the Movement from an industry that contributes to significant mortality, illness and suffering worldwide.

A. Conflicts of interest as a public health actor

- By adopting *Strategy 2020* all National Societies agreed to collectively promote public health and help build healthy communities around the world. Meanwhile, governments in 180 countries have signed the World Health Organization's Framework Convention for Tobacco Control (FCTC).
- As stated by the Framework Convention for Tobacco Control: There is a fundamental and irreconcilable conflict between the tobacco industry's interests and public health policy interests¹. The tobacco industry produces and promotes a product that has been proven scientifically to be addictive, to cause disease and death and to give rise to a variety of social ills, including increased poverty².

B. Aiding and abating the industry's influence

A single industry is responsible for the death of about 1 in 10 adults worldwide. Full implementation of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control would bring the single biggest blow to heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and respiratory disease (WHO).

However, one of the challenges facing the 180 parties to the Convention is the strength of the tobacco industry advertising, public relations and philanthropy budgets and strategies. As a result, the Parties to the Convention agreed to curb the ability of the industry in this domain in their countries, and the Secretariat of the Convention, the World Health Organization, is charged to engage with all parties including international organizations to do the same.

The guidelines to article 5.3 of the Tobacco Control Convention state that "The tobacco industry conducts activities described as socially responsible to distance

1. World Health Organization's Framework Convention for Tobacco Control (FCTC)

2. WHO 2014 Tobacco factsheet: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs339/en/>

its image from the lethal nature of the product it produces and sells or to interfere with the setting and implementation of public health policies.”³

C. Breaching our principles?

The **Fundamental Principles** call on the Red Cross and Red Crescent to focus on the most vulnerable, which compounds the ethical challenge: who are the most vulnerable? The 1 in 10 dying of disease due to tobacco use, and whom we help with community health care and other programs? The countless others who suffer tobacco-related disease and disability throughout their foreshortened lives? The millions of young people – in poor and rich communities alike – who are attracted to tobacco advertising and who will become addicted? Or the victims of the disaster for whom we need support to which a tobacco firm is willing to contribute?

3. *Guidelines for the implementation of article 5.3 of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control on the protection of public health policies with respect to tobacco control from commercial and other vested interests of the tobacco industry.* http://www.who.int/fctc/guidelines/article_5_3.pdf

2. Red Cross Red Crescent regulations on tobacco companies

- The mission of the RCRC Movement is to *prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found, to protect life and health and ensure respect for the human being*.⁴ The Movement's Regulations on the Use of the Red Cross/Red Crescent Emblem⁵, stipulate that [a business partner]... must in no way be engaged in activities running counter to the Movement's objectives and Principles or which might be regarded by the public as controversial and acknowledge that the sale of tobacco is directly contrary to the Movement's objectives, and clearly state that linking... names or logos of such companies with those of a National Society must therefore be avoided.
- Resolution 30 of the 25th International Conference of the Red Cross/Red Crescent recognized the incompatibility between tobacco and health and that passive smoking violates the right to health of nonsmokers. It called on National Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies to support measures of the WHO for the implementation of strategies on smoking control, and encourage the total ban, restrictions or limitations on tobacco advertising.⁶
- Red Cross/Red Crescent Policy for Corporate Sector Partnerships describes “companies that have as their core business the direct manufacture of or sale of products publicly recognized as deleterious to health (3.3.1)⁷ and companies with major public controversies that would undermine the reputation, image or Emblems of the Movement” (3.3.4) as examples of types of partnerships that infringe on the Movement's objectives and principles.
- The second strategic aim of the IFRC's *Strategy 2020* is to enable healthy and safe living. It encourages action on the underlying social, behavioural and environmental factors that determine good health, including influencing public policies and social mobilization to act specifically on the local factors that have the greatest potential to reduce preventable death, disease, injury and disability. They include, among others, tackling smoking, alcohol and other substance abuse.
- The IFRC Global Framework for Non-communicable Diseases (NCDs) Prevention and Control, developed within the framework of Strategic Aim 2 of *Strategy 2020*, defines what RCRC Societies can do to combat NCDs; it urges National Societies to advocate at the national level to adapt policies on NCDs prevention and control⁸. Accepting tobacco money harms IFRC's reputation and credibility and impedes its efforts to be a leading organization in NCDs prevention and control, the diseases which share the highest burden of diseases, and there is consensus among all countries to add it as a key goal for the Sustainable Development Goals.

4. Statutes of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. <http://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/other/statutes-en-a5.pdf>

5. Regulations International Review of the Red Cross (1992) No. 289 30.08.92, <http://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/misc/57jmbg.htm>, accessed 05.11.12.

6. *International Review of the Red Cross* (1986), no. 256, 31.08.86 accessed on 10 November 2012 at <http://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/misc/57jmdz.htm>

7. With core business defined alternately as products accounting for 15 per cent of annual revenues for retailers or 5 per cent of annual revenues from sales).

8. IFRC 2011, www.ifrc.org/ncd

“The tobacco industry conducts activities described as “socially responsible” to distance its image from the lethal nature of the product it produces and sells or to interfere with the setting and implementation of public health policies.”

**Framework
Convention on
Tobacco Control,
Guideline
for article 5.3.**

- The IFRC Governing Board, at its Session in May 2013, issued a Decision regarding the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and tobacco industry donations, as follows: “*understanding* the ethical and reputational and credibility implications of accepting donations from the tobacco industry including the impact this might have on other components of the Movement and the Movement as a whole, *urges* National Societies to refrain from accepting funds from the tobacco industry ...” (Governing Board Decision 21.1, 13/01/29).

3. World Health Organization framework convention on tobacco control

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The World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) was adopted on 21 May 2003 and celebrates its tenth anniversary in 2015 as it entered into force on 27 February 2005. The Convention is legally binding for the 180 States that have adhered to it. One of the most quickly ratified treaties in United Nations history, it is a supranational agreement that seeks “to protect present and future generations from the devastating health, social, environmental and economic consequences of tobacco consumption and exposure to tobacco smoke” by enacting a set of universal standards stating the dangers of tobacco and limiting its use in all forms worldwide.

The Conference of the Parties (COP) is the governing body of the FCTC and is comprised of all Parties to the Convention. On October 2014, the 6th COP decided to protect public health policies from commercial and other vested interests of the tobacco industry, insisting on the promotion of FCTC article 5.3 and its Guidelines to pertinent international organizations and **ensure rejection by international organizations of any direct or indirect contributions from the tobacco industry.**

Therefore, all states members of the World Health Assembly (a WHO governing body) and signatories to the FCTC expect WHO and associated parties to request the Red Cross and Red Crescent and other agencies to reject any direct or indirect contributions from the tobacco industry.

According to the Article 5.3 Guidelines, Parties to the Convention should:

- Not treat tobacco corporations as “stakeholders” in public health policy.
- Not invest in the tobacco industry.
- Not partner with tobacco corporations to promote public health or other purposes.
- Not accept the tobacco industry’s so-called corporate social responsibility schemes.

In addition, there are certain activities prohibited under the Article 5.3 Guidelines:

- No partnerships, non-binding, or non-enforceable agreements with tobacco industry
- No voluntary contributions by tobacco industry to governments.
- No tobacco industry-drafted legislation or policy, or voluntary codes as substitutes for legally enforceable measures.
- No investments by governments or public officials in tobacco industry.
- No tobacco industry representation on government tobacco control bodies or FCTC delegations

4. Conclusion



For all of the reasons noted above, National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies are reminded of Governing Board Decision 21.1, 13/01/29 and are urged “to refrain from accepting funds from the tobacco industry...”.

The Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

Humanity The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

Impartiality It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

Neutrality In order to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

Independence The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

Voluntary service It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

Unity There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

Universality The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.

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