



July - September 2021

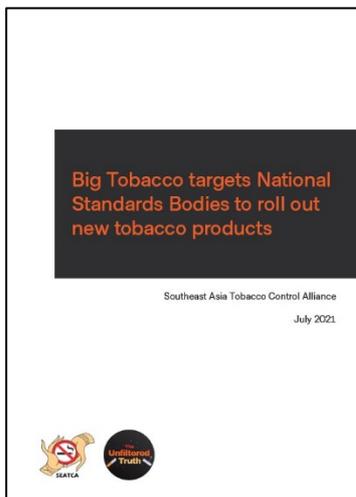
## SUCCESS STORIES FROM THE ASEAN REGION:

### Cambodia: SEATCA's Response to [JT International \(JTI\) Interview](#) in the Phnom Penh Post

An interview with tobacco company JT International (JTI) was published in the Phnom Penh Post on 27 June 2021. According to JTI, the tax increase in Cambodia must be implemented step by step to prevent illicit trade that will result in the reduction of government revenue.

The Southeast Asia Tobacco Control Alliance (SEATCA) sent the newspaper a response to correct the misleading information about tobacco tax and illicit trade in JTI's interview and to propose recommendations to the Cambodian government. The tobacco industry sells a very harmful product that kills half of its own customers prematurely. Every year, 15,000 Cambodians die from tobacco-related diseases, of whom 33% are from the lowest income group. In addition, tobacco use costs Cambodia KHR 2.7 trillion every year, equivalent to 3% of its GDP in 2017. This compares to 1.8% of GDP on an average in other countries, meaning that Cambodia loses almost twice as much money compared to other countries (source: UNDP 2019 <https://bit.ly/3wIFDAs>). This is alarming for a country with many poor people. If tobacco consumption continues to rise, which is what JTI is promoting, Cambodia will pay a much higher cost than it does today.

### New publication:



#### Big Tobacco targets National Standards Bodies to roll out new tobacco products

While five governments in the ASEAN region have banned electronic smoking devices (ESD), other governments are still weighing their regulation. To bypass the Ministry of Health's jurisdiction over tobacco control, the tobacco industry and its front groups are targeting national standards bodies, usually under the Ministry of Trade or Industry, as an alternative government agency to regulate electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS) and heated tobacco products (HTP). By shifting this regulatory responsibility to the national standards body, the tobacco industry is shifting attention away from health harms to instead focus on the manufacturing quality of their products. Because the Ministry of Trade or Industry is usually business friendly, the tobacco industry anticipates this will result in a

policy that will make these products widely available.

This handout spotlights how the tobacco industry has influenced national standards bodies across the ASEAN region, how pro-ESD front groups have exerted influence on standards for ENDS and HTPs, and the links of the tobacco industry with international standards bodies. The handout will provide recommendations for governments to counter tobacco industry interference according to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC).

## WHAT IS THE TOBACCO/VAPING INDUSTRY UP TO IN THE REGION

### 1. Tobacco industry interference in tobacco control policies and regulations:

- *Cambodia:* From 1 August all cigarette packs sold in Cambodia must carry new pictorial health warnings covering 55% of the surface of the packs. However, on 10 June 2021, the tobacco companies, facilitated by the Cambodian Ministry of Economics and Finance, [met](#) with the Ministry of Health and requested to delay the implementation of new pictorial health warnings.
- *Vietnam:* The Ministry of Health has a clear position to ban the commercialization of new generation tobacco products. However in 2020, the Ministry of Industry and Trade proposed a regulatory policy for e-cigarettes. A tobacco industry tactic is to use national standards bodies to develop standards for e-cigarettes thereby paving the way to legalize them.
- *Thailand:* Philip Morris Trading (Thailand) Co. Ltd. created a Facebook page "Thai Smokers Group." Frequently, the page admin posts messages to discredit the tobacco control law, including the ban on ESD, tobacco tax, and standardized packaging claiming these measures don't help reduce the number of smokers.

### 2. Tobacco industry tactics to sell ESD to the youth:

- The latest study of the [Global Web Index 2021](#) shows some critical findings related to the digital behaviors of young people (16-24 years old) in South-East Asia including daily time spent on internet that Filipinos spend an average of almost 11 hours online each day, which is almost 60% more than the global average and favorite social media platforms that more than 25% internet users, aged 16 – 24 years across the region said Facebook is their favorite social media platform.
- Though e-cigarette companies claim they don't target youth for customers, online e-cigarette advertisements through popular social media platforms appeal to young people have been found. Social media influencers promoting e-cigarettes are common across ASEAN, especially in Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam.

### 3. Tobacco industry tactics to increase their public image as good corporation:

- *Malaysia:* British American Tobacco (BAT) Malaysia sponsored [Hari Raya Aidilfitri](#) celebration for three charitable organizations in Kuala Lumpur, namely Dapur Rakyat, Ibupreneur and Komuniti Tukang Jahit. The end of Ramadan is a religious holiday celebrated by Muslims in Malaysia on 6-7 July in 2021.
- *Cambodia:* Power Cigar Tobacco Co., Ltd has been repeatedly breaking the Cambodian Tobacco Control law by advertising and promoting tobacco products online through social media ([Facebook](#)) and offline media, on outdoor posters. The company also [gives free cigarettes](#) and other items with its brand logo.

### 4. ENDS/HTP front groups attack on public health institutions and advocacy groups: In the Philippines, Pro-vaping groups, Coalition of Asia Pacific Tobacco Harm Reduction Advocates (CAPHRA) and Vapers PH, continue to attack tobacco control advocates maliciously claiming they interference in tobacco control policy making. CAPHRA has [attacked](#) health advocates in their opposition to the proposed Senate Bill No. 2239, criticized by calling to question their funding. Under Philippine laws, advocacy groups are not prohibited from receiving money from institutions that promote public health, hence CAPHRA attacks are just malicious and serves to distract attention away from the real issue that e-cigarettes are not harmless and should be banned.

- 5. Philip Morris' in-kind contribution:** Since 2018, PMI has been making in-kind contribution to its important markets, such as Indonesia, the Philippines, and Malaysia. However, the recipients remain unknown.

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