



# THE OBSERVATORY ON TOBACCO INDUSTRY STRATEGIES

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## *Editorial*

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### **BACK HOME**

I began working as the head of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) in June 2014.

By the time I got there, I had already had international experience in the intergovernmental treaty negotiation process, in a director position at WHO, and in its implementation, working as a regional advisor to the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO).

Besides, more than twenty years of experience at the national level provided and assured me that I could assist the State Parties to the treaty in implementing its measures.

I left Brazil with a network of colleagues and friends who had already had their work recognized worldwide and, better yet, at the moment the country was celebrating a major drop in smoking prevalence.

I returned home In February this year, after almost six years at the head of the Convention Secretariat. They were challenging years involving diplomacy and representation, combined with technical knowledge, that led me to the following reflections:

The Secretariat responds to the demands of 181 countries with different cultures, resources, priorities and political scenarios. Meeting these specificities is a long lasting job,



*Vera Luiza da Costa  
e Silva*  
ex-chief of the WHO/  
FCTC Secretariat

since, while one side of the globe sleeps, the other is awake seeking answers. In addition to the numerous trips made at the invitation of governments, virtual demand progressively requires almost real-time replies.

The Convention Secretariat is a semi-independent body with limited resources and no regional or national structure. It is hosted by WHO and, despite having the help of the agency, it does not belong to it. Then, it needs to constantly inform, establish partnerships and foster collaboration with various WHO departments to broaden the coverage of its functions. It is also necessary to consider options on international cooperation with other intergovernmental bodies with a decentralized structure that can support their parties' work.

The Secretariat is not a public health entity, but a body that provides support to the parties to the treaty in the implementation of economic, social, environmental and health measures, which go far beyond the competence of one

sector. This paradigm shift has been central in the development of its activities and it needs to be reflected in the countries' public policies, with the treaty being a responsibility of the State, with the health sector maintaining a central but shared role in its implementation.

The WHO FCTC has the mandate and the commitment not to accept any collaboration involving conflict of interest, whether it is related to the tobacco industry - the driving force behind tobacco consumption in the world - or, more recently, to electronic nicotine delivery systems. This is also the case for tobacco product tracking companies and their divergence regarding the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products implementation steps.

These Convention Secretariat challenges mirror the same difficulties experienced at regional, national and sub-national levels. The health sector, isolated and, usually, without great political strength, may perceive itself as powerless to implement the treaty measures that are part of other sectors' scope, which, in turn, may not feel responsible for such measures, seeking to delegate their duty. A weak State policy and the tobacco industry taking advantage of this weakness to divide, contest and deceive can create important obstacles in the implementation of the treaty. Thus, we are all struggling in this immense universe of treaty implementation, as a result of the tobacco industry lobby, lack of political priority and intersectoral involvement, and parallel priorities.

In spite of these challenges, the Secretariat, its partners and the countries it serves, including Brazil, demonstrate that progress in the implementation of the treaty has no turning back and this epidemic is moving towards its decline and eradication.

## THE OBSERVATORY ON TOBACCO INDUSTRY STRATEGIES TURNS 4 YEARS OLD AND LAUNCHES SECTION ON COVID-19

The Observatory on Tobacco Industry Strategies, linked to National School of Public Health Sergio Arouca (ENSP/Fiocruz), completed 4 years of tobacco industry monitoring in March 2020. By then, Fiocruz's platform had received hundreds of hits from various countries around the world and had denounced, through more than one thousand indexed documents, the tactics that the tobacco industry adopts to promote a pro-tobacco agenda and undermine tobacco control policies. In the face of the new coronavirus pandemic, the Observatory's team has launched the section "Tobacco Industry and Covid-19", the objective of which is to gather documents and pieces of news that demonstrate public opinion manipulation in order to gain respectability and improve its reputation through "corporate social responsibility" activities.

*"Self-promotion is one of TI's most used strategies and the Observatory at the Center for the Study of Tobacco and Health Studies/ENSP is attentive to this type of initiative. The creation of the section on Covid-19 is one of the activities of our fourth year of operations. Later this year, we will launch the new Observatory's website, which will have a greater interface with Fiocruz's initiatives and will allow a better navigability to users", explained the coordinator, Silvana Rubano Turci.*



## OBSERVATORY ON STRATEGIES OF THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY



The new section was created in the second half of March and, over three months, gathered about 30 documents on the tobacco industry link to Covid-19. According to librarian Alex Medeiros Kornalewski, responsible for the registers, the criterion obeys two aspects:

*“The first step is to check the news or document source, that is, if it comes from a major or local newspaper, magazine, scientific article, photo, audio, video, advertisement, report from tobacco companies and/or shell companies or official report from national or international governmental or non-governmental agencies, among others. Then, we analyzed the document accuracy and authority criteria”,* he clarified.

Fiocruz’s platform was created to meet WHO FCTC Article 5.3 guidelines, which emphasizes the adoption of measures to protect public health policies directed to tobacco control from commercial or other interests of the tobacco industry. According to Fiocruz’s president, Nísia Trindade Lima, who wrote the editorial of the Observatory’s Bulletin first edition, the platform is a pioneering initiative and it reinforces Fiocruz’s role in promoting and preventing health to improve the quality of life in the country.

*“The Observatory is a pioneer in the world so far, once it is the only one that operates under the auspices of a public institution. Its primary objective is to fully implement Article 5.3. The tool gathers and analyzes documents, providing information on what strategies the tobacco industry uses in order to undermine tobacco control policies, as well as presenting the legislative measures that Brazil has adopted to comply with what WHO FCTC recommends,”* said Fiocruz’s president.

The Observatory’s more than one thousand documents are divided according to the following industry strategies: maneuvering to hijack political and legislative processes, overstating the industry’s economic importance, manipulating public opinion to gain the appearance of respectability; ‘creating’ illusion of support through front groups, undermining the credibility of proven scientific research, intimidating governments with litigation or threat of litigation, the Tobacco industry and its affiliates, and industry people, lawyers, politicians, scientists, libertarians etc.



## Report

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### **STOP MONITORING SUMMARY: THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY TACTICS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

In a report released on April 23, Stop (Stopping Tobacco Organizations & Products) highlighted a series of tobacco industry actions during the Covid-19 pandemic. The document, which includes a survey carried out from March 20 to April 16, 2020, points to the use of corporate social responsibility (CSR) through donations of medical supplies and money to cities and/or institutions in many countries, including Brazil.

Among the main activities are the investment in technology for vaccine development; political interference on tobacco products sale and manufacturing; attempts to mislead science about the smoking links to Covid-19, taking advantage of it to promote its products; and criticism against public health organizations, such as WHO.

*“CSR has been an important tobacco industry tactic during the pandemic. It is probably seen as a good opportunity to clean up its public image and encourage governments to work with the industry, against what is stated in the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. Investments in biotechnology and pharmaceuticals give the impression that the industry is ‘part of the solution’,” the document reveals.*



Regarding the donations, Stop disclaims that tobacco companies, worldwide, in particular Philip Morris International (PMI) and British American Tobacco (BAT), have donated ventilators (Greece), personal protective equipment (PPE) and hand sanitizers (Bangladesh, USA and Canada, Philippines, Nigeria, Kenya, Georgia), and money to fight the pandemic (Brazil, Romania, Bulgaria, South Africa, India, Lebanon, Uganda).

The report reveals political interference attempts and industry lobbying in the UK, France, Italy, Spain, Indonesia, New Zealand, Russia, South Africa, Pakistan and Brazil, where, in addition to claiming that restricting production would increase illicit trade, the industry maintained cigarette production to avoid “jeopardizing the business.”



According to the organizers, this is the first in a series of updates summarizing the monitoring of the tobacco industry’s tactics during the Covid-19 pandemic. Stop states that there will be a new edition every two weeks. Check the full document at [https://exposetobacco.org/..](https://exposetobacco.org/)



Protecting youth from industry manipulation and preventing tobacco and nicotine products use is the theme defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) for World No Tobacco Day in 2020.

In 2020, Brazil celebrates 15 years of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control implementation in the country.

**Due to the Coronavirus pandemic, the Ninth Session WHO FCTC Conference of the Parties to WHO FCTC (COP9), and the Second Session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products (MOP2) were postponed to 2021, between November 8 and 13, and November 15-17, respectively.**

ACT Health Promotion and the Brazilian Medical Association (AMB) launched a campaign on electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS) on World Health Day. Entitled #VapeVicia, the campaign reveals that the innovations employed in these electronic devices are a trap used by the cigarette industry to win over new smokers.

The Union promoted, on April 28, the webinar “Challenges to face the tobacco industry interference in times of covid-19”. The activity was part of the World No Tobacco Day celebrations.

Check out the debate: <https://bit.ly/3e3IWou>

The new Tobacco Tactics website from the University of Bath in England is already online. The new platform has more than 800 entries in the main tobacco industry players, allies and tactics, with shortcuts for searches and new content.

Visit: [www.tobaccotactics.org](http://www.tobaccotactics.org)

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