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17th August, 2020

**THE CHIEF OF STAFF
OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE
REPUBLIC OF GHANA
JUBILEE HOUSE, ACCRA**

Dear Madam,

**COVID-19 AND TOBACCO INDUSTRY INTERFERENCES IN
GHANA'S PUBLIC HEALTH PROGRAMMES AND INITIATIVES**

The Institute of Leadership and Development (INSLA) is a non-profit civil society center aimed at strengthening leadership capacity and promoting development. INSLA's goal is to stimulate discussions and actions to make humanity and the environment productive, safe and healthier.

Being a member of the African Tobacco Control Alliance (ATCA), a non-profit, non-political, Pan-African network of more than 120 civil society organizations in 38 African countries dedicated to preventing an epidemic of tobacco use on the continent and its detrimental impact on the health and well-being of Africans, the Institute of Leadership and Development (INSLA) is concerned about possible tobacco industry attempts to exploit the COVID-19 pandemic to boost the tobacco business at the detriment of public health.

Ghana, as a Party to the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), domesticated the FCTC through the passage of the Public Health Act 851 of 2012, with Part Six (6) of the Act focusing on tobacco control measures.

As at Saturday August 15, 2020, the Ghana Health Service (GHS) COVID-19 information website reported that, the number of total confirmed COVID-19 cases in Ghana stood at 42,653, with 40,567 as the number of recovered/discharged cases. The COVID-19 active cases are reported as 1,847. The total number of COVID-19 related deaths is 239¹.

As at Tuesday August 18, 2020, Ghana has been ranked the 3rd country on the COVID-19 Chart in the WHO Afro Region² and 52nd worldwide³

¹ <https://ghanhealthservice.org/covid19/>

² <https://who.maps.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/0c9b3a8b68d0437a8c128551e9c063a9>

³ <https://covid19.who.int/table>

Tobacco smoking is a known risk factor for many respiratory infections and increases the severity of respiratory diseases. A review of studies by public health experts convened by the

World Health Organisation (WHO) on 29th April 2020 found that smokers are more likely to develop severe disease with COVID-19, compared to non-smokers. COVID-19 is an infectious disease that primarily attacks the lungs and smoking impairs lung function making it harder for the body to fight off coronavirus and other diseases.

Also, tobacco is a major risk factor for non-communicable diseases (NCDs) like cardiovascular disease, cancer, respiratory disease and diabetes. People with these conditions are at higher risk of developing severe complications if they become sick with COVID-19. Available research suggests that smokers are at higher risk of developing severe disease and death⁴.

The tobacco industry is fully aware of the devastating consequences of its products, yet it invests heavily around the world to create a favorable environment for its business, even when it is clear that this puts many lives at risk. To sway authorities and the public from the negative image its products and actions bear, the tobacco industry engages in humanitarian gestures like the offering of financial donations and life-saving equipment including ventilators, hand sanitizers and face masks to governments. Such gestures have been identified in countries like Uganda and Zambia, and the tobacco industry continues to use it to clean its image in the continent. They usually aim at putting governments at a tight end with regards to the implementation of tobacco control policies in the future.

The tobacco industry engages in this activity to portray itself as a responsible entity which cares for the well-being of COVID-19 patients, when in effect, its products only help to aggravate their situation. Historically, the industry has engaged in such Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives to give the impression that it is a development partner, when its product actually kills 8 million people around the world annually. Article 5.3 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control to which Ghana is a party requires that governments reject any form of collaboration with the tobacco industry.

Based on the points above, we call on the Government of Ghana (GoG) to reject any offer and any type of support that may come from the tobacco industry, its affiliates and allies in the management, control and treatment of COVID-19. We urge Government to continue to protect the public health of the population as against the profit motive of the tobacco industry and its allies. We conclude by calling on government to invest in the implementation of the Tobacco Control Measures of ACT 851 and prioritize the Tobacco Control National Health Agenda and in the fight against COVID-19.

⁴ <https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/11-05-2020-who-statement-tobacco-use-and-covid-19#:~:text=Tobacco%20smoking%20is%20a%20known,%2C%20compared%20to%20non%20smokers>

Yours Sincerely



Mr. Benjamin Anabila
Director

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024-0960013

CC:

1. Ministry of Health (MOH)
2. Presidential Committee on COVID-19
3. Ghana Health Service (GHS)
4. Food and Drugs Authority (FDA)
5. National COVID-19 Trust Fund
6. Ghana Medical Association (GMA)
7. World Health Organization (WHO)
8. Ghana SDG Secretariat
9. Media
10. CSOs

