

A STATEMENT DELIVERED BY MR BANJAMIN ANABILA: DIRECTOR OF INSTITUTE OF LEADERSHIP AND DEVELOPMENT (INSLA) AND NATIONAL TREASURER OF GHANA NCD ALLIANCE AT A PRESS CONFERENCE ON COVID-19 AND TOBACCO CONTROL ON TUESDAY, 25TH AUGUST 2020 AT CSIR HALL, ACCRA

THEME: 'REJECT ANY SUPPORT FROM THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY'

Good morning leaders of Civil Society Organizations, ladies and gentlemen from the press.

We want to express our heartfelt gratitude for having you here at this important press conference.

The theme for our encounter this morning is calling on government to 'Reject any support from the tobacco industry' in the management and control of Covid-19 and any other public health emergencies in Ghana.

(Ladies and gentlemen)

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.

The Institute of Leadership and Development (INSLA) is a member of the African Tobacco Control Alliance (ATCA). ATCA is 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) and its partners are concerned about possible tobacco industry attempts to exploit the COVID-19 pandemic to boost the tobacco business at the detriment of public health on the continent.

Ghana as a Party, domesticated the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) through the passage of the Public Health Act 851 of 2012, with Part Six (6) of the Act focusing on tobacco control measures. The first global public health Convention urges Member States including Ghana to protect tobacco control and public health policies from commercial and other vested interest of the tobacco industry.

(Ladies and Gentlemen of the press)

As at Monday August 24, 2020, the Ghana Health Service (GHS) COVID-19 information website reported that, the number of total confirmed COVID-19 cases in Ghana stood at 43,622 with 41,695 as the number of recovered/discharged cases. The total number of COVID-19 related deaths is 263.

As at Monday August 24, 2020, Ghana has been ranked the 3rd country on the COVID-19 Chart in the WHO Africa Region (AFRO) and 52nd worldwide.

(CSO Leaders, ladies and gentlemen from the press)

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

convened by the World Health Organization (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 infected with COVID-19. Available research suggests that smokers are at higher risk of developing severe disease and death.

(Ladies and gentlemen of the press, it is worth noting that)

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, 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. It is usually aim at putting governments at a tight end with regards to the implementation of tobacco control and public health 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 tobacco industry and its allies have engaged in such Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives to give the impression that it is a development partner and a stakeholder, when its product actually kills 8 million people around the world annually. WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control to which Ghana is a party and Schedules 2 of Ghana's Public Health Act 851 requires that governments reject any form of sponsorship including CSR of the tobacco industry.

(Leaders of CSOs, Ladies and gentlemen of the press)

Based on the points enumerated above, INSLA and its partners are calling on the Government of Ghana (GoG) to;

1. 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 pandemic in Ghana.
2. Continue to protect the public health of Ghana's population against the profit motive of the tobacco industry and its allies.

3. Invest in the implementation of the Tobacco Control Measures of the Public Health Act 851 of 2012 and prioritize Tobacco Control in the National Health Agenda and in the fight against COVID-19 risk factors.

We conclude by calling on government to boldly place a temporary ban on the sales and use of tobacco and tobacco products as and when a vaccine or sustainable treatment is found for Covid-19. The Spanish Region of GALICIA has completely ban smoking over Covid-19 risk and South Africa which also place a ban on the sales of Tobacco from April, 2020 as measures to reduce the spread of covid-19.

Thank you for your kind attention.

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INSLA is a member of the African Tobacco Control Alliance (ATCA) and Ghana NCD Alliance (GhNCDA). INSLA host and also a member of the Ghana Healthy Diet Alliance (GHDA), Coalition on the Narcotic Control Law, Ghana Physical Activity Network (GPAN) and Smart Ghana of Smart International.

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