



DATE

Mr Cyril Muller
Vice President, Europe and Central Asia
The World Bank
E-mail: cmuller@worldbank.org
Cc: Kristalina Georgieva, CEO The World Bank

Dear Mr Muller,

I am writing on behalf of **xx** public health and tobacco control organisations across Europe to express our concern related to participation of a World Bank representative at a regional meeting sponsored by Japan Tobacco International (JTI)¹. The Regional Summit of Finance Ministers, National Bank Governors and Tax Administration Directors "Regional Financial Stability in the New Global Environment" took place on June 16-17, 2017 in Becici, Montenegro. Senior Financial Sector Development Specialist in the World Bank's Europe and Central Asia region, Mr. Rinku Chandra, was a speaker on the panel "Global challenges, local solutions".²

We have two main concerns related to this meeting. Firstly, the tobacco industry used it as a means to undermine public policies with respect to tobacco taxation. As we understand, the burning problem of illicit trade of tobacco products that damages state budgets has been repeatedly discussed at the Summit. JTI therefore had a platform to misrepresent the true causes of illicit trade and, instead, depict illicit trade as an alleged consequence of increasing excise duties on tobacco and to lobby against tobacco tax increases³. This not only undermines effective public health policy and proven cost-effective tobacco control measures⁴ but also hampers efforts to comply with the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control and reduce smoking prevalence in Western Balkans countries, one of the highest in the world.

Secondly, participation of the World Bank officials at a tobacco industry sponsored summit may be perceived as a contradictory signal from a global institution committed to the advancement of the sustainable development goals and to the implementation of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control which is a key pillar of SDG3. Also, this could be seen as condoning the tobacco industry's depiction of tobacco taxes as going against governments' best interests. However, the World Bank has repeatedly argued in favour of raising tobacco taxes as a sound policy⁵ and has long supported tobacco taxation efforts in countries in low and middle income countries.

We have written to all the government representatives present at the Summit reminding them of obligations undertaken as Parties to the FCTC, in particular its Article 5.3, to protect their public health policies from tobacco industry interests in 2011, the UN General Assembly recognised "the fundamental conflict of interest between the tobacco industry and public health"⁶. Article 5.3 of the FCTC, requires governments to protect "public health policies with respect to tobacco control" from the "commercial and other vested interests of the tobacco industry". The guidelines to this Article include: "parties should not

1 Agenda of the Summit of Ministries of Finance, Bank Governors and Tax Administration Directors <https://goo.gl/VjJR7i>

2 <https://goo.gl/ZoveJX>

3 BiH lose millions because of black market and tobacco smuggling <https://goo.gl/Urxmlb>

4 Alarming: BiH lost more than five billion KM for smuggling cigarettes <https://goo.gl/a6LYBh>

5 <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/health/brief/tobacco>

6 (A/RES/66/2, Political Declaration of the High-Level Meeting on the Prevention of Non-Communicable Diseases)



accept, support or endorse the tobacco industry organizing, promoting, participating in ... any initiatives that are directly or indirectly related to tobacco control" and "parties should not endorse, support, form partnerships with or participate in activities of the tobacco industry described as socially responsible".

Taking into consideration the World Bank Group's long term commitment to tobacco control, and its unambiguous global policy on tobacco since the 1990s, we are deeply concerned with this situation where the World Bank was associated with tobacco industry activities. The participation of the World Bank's officials in this Summit could seriously impact the tobacco control programs which the World Bank is implementing on national level (e.g. the project "Reducing Health Risk Factors in Bosnia and Herzegovina" implemented by the World Bank with the financial support from the Swiss Government)

We urge you to address this inappropriate situation and trust that you will take the necessary steps to uphold the spirit and principles of Article 5.3 of FCTC in decisions regarding participation in future events and conferences.

We look forward to your response and remain at your disposal for any further information.

Uliana Bakh,
Executive Director, Association PROI

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Uliana Bakh', is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Cc

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Endorsed by the following partner organizations:

