

Sign on Letter Campaign promoted by CNPT, Nofumadores.org and ASH

The island of La Graciosa is located in the archipelago of the Canary Islands. It is a small island with only 737 inhabitants. La Graciosa is not paved and is energy self-sufficient. It is a tourist enclave of high environmental interest. Administration of the island relies upon the Teguisse City Council on the island of Tenerife. In June, it launched the campaign "La Graciosa sin humo" [La Graciosa Without Smoke]. It is summarized as follows:

The Teguisse City Council, in conjunction with its inhabitants, businesses, associations and visitors, and with support from Philip Morris International, would like to turn the island into the first in the country to earn the "SMOKE-FREE CULTURE" CERTIFICATION. This certification has been developed by TÜV AUSTRIA, a multinational that says it is independent, but whose activities include the promotion of tobacco products as alternatives to cigarettes.

In other words, the campaign can be explained as follows. PMI pays the Teguisse City Council for the campaign in exchange for promoting its heated tobacco devices (IQOS), and at the same time, serving to wash its image.

When this campaign reached the ears of the tobacco control community in Spain, it unanimously condemned, through media and social media, the fact that the City Council collaborated with the tobacco industry in contradiction to Article 5.3 of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC). Faced with an outcry from some members of the Teguisse City Council, who at first had supported the initiative, they [now] requested that the agreement be terminated when they understood the deception and manipulation into which they had fallen. Their proposal was taken to a plenary session of the City Council and was rejected, with 11 votes against ending the collaboration with PMI and 10 votes in favor of ending the agreement with PMI.

As a society, we cannot allow PMI to whitewash its image and to appropriate slogans that are only legitimate in the mouths of the tobacco control community, so it is essential that this agreement be terminated. To this end, we want to send the attached letter to the Teguisse City Council, the Spanish Ministry of Health, and the Government of Spain, demanding that the agreement be terminated, because if we are not able to stop this campaign paid for by PMI, the island of La Graciosa will be only the first of many other territories where PMI wants to establish its own idea of a "smoke-free world."

For this reason, we request your support by asking you to add your signature to the letter.

Read the Sign on Letter here
Att. D. Pedro Sanchez
President of the Government of Spain

Dear Mr. Sanchez,

We, the undersigned, as presidents of professional health associations and scientific societies, university professors, directors of hospitals, primary care, and public health services, civil society, consumers, and environmental and human rights associations, at the national and international level, want to express our concern about the events that are taking place on the Island of La Graciosa (Canary Islands, Spain) and, specifically, about the campaign "La Graciosa sin humo" [La Graciosa Without Smoke], organized by the Teguisse City Council in collaboration with Philip Morris International.

This collaboration violates Article 5.3 of the World Health Organization's FCTC (Framework Convention on Tobacco Control), which Spain ratified on January 11, 2005, joining the European Union and 180 other countries that are Parties to this international public health treaty. This article relates to tobacco industry interference in public health policies, defending them from the commercial interests of the tobacco industry. The article specifically prohibits the tobacco industry from sponsorship or participation in actions organized by public bodies of the Convention's signatory countries.

As such, this collaboration goes against the spirit of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 3: "Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages," which includes the Goal 3.A urging countries to "Strengthen the implementation of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control in all countries, as appropriate."

For this reason, the United Nations Global Compact, the world's largest corporate sustainability initiative, instituted an exclusion for tobacco companies in 2017, because "tobacco products are in direct conflict with UN goals, particularly with the right to public health, and undermines the achievement of SDG 3."

We would like you to take into account:

- That the consumption of tobacco and nicotine causes more than 8 million premature deaths in the world each year, with at least 69,000 in Spain, in addition to a greater number of new chronic patients, causing a lot of suffering and substantial health and social costs. The various legislative measures applied in the economically more developed countries have played an important role in reducing the consumption of the classic nicotine-dispensing products (cigarettes, cigars, water pipes, etc.) as a whole, so far this century.

- That is why in recent years the tobacco industry has expanded and reoriented its business toward the promotion of heated tobacco products (such as IQOS, Glo, etc.) and electronic cigarettes (such as Blu, Logic, JUUL, IQOS MESH, etc.). These products also dispense nicotine and are therefore capable of maintaining an already-established addiction and creating addictive disorders in new users. While it is possible that e-cigarettes are less toxic than older products, there is no conclusive evidence that heated tobacco products are, no matter how much their marketers say so.

- These new products are being aggressively promoted to young people so that the industry can bolster its income statement after the drop in cigarette sales, using marketing strategies, mainly through new technologies and hitherto unusual public relations strategies, such as the "La Graciosa sin humo" campaign or paid promotions through influencers on social media.

- The industry for these new products distorts the scientific evidence through the biased and unilateral use of the term "harm reduction," a concept originated in public health. They present their products as a strategy for individuals to reduce harm, even to quit smoking, without substantial scientific or empirical evidence of this, and without considering the implications for the health of the general population that this entails. They offer their new products as the solution to a problem that they themselves have created and continue to maintain. Some companies have been convicted by the courts for illegally promoting their heated tobacco products. The industry hides that between 60-90% of users continue dual consumption, with cigarettes as well, so that the addiction and real risk are not reduced substantially or significantly.

- It is not the first time that the tobacco industry, the nicotinic-addiction industry, is trying to promote its new products as healthier (filter cigarettes, light or low-nicotine tobacco, premier cigarettes, among others). Apart from opening new market niches, it is clear that they seek to avoid--or at least postpone--stricter regulation of their new products. What they are really concerned about is the effectiveness of tobacco control strategies to undo normalization.

- Although the tagline "without smoke" implies greater ecological awareness, an effect clearly sought in the promotion of these products, scientific evidence shows that in no case are they harmless and that the aerosols they release also contain toxic substances, in many cases in smaller quantities, but in other cases in larger quantities. Additionally, the waste that these products generate (both the refills and the devices themselves) can hardly be considered environmentally friendly, causing pollution just like cigarette butts.

- Let's be clear, the tobacco industry continues to be part of the problem of the tobacco epidemic and nicotinic addiction. There is no sign that they are part of the solution to a problem that they have generated and that they continue to maintain.

- Recently, the organization STOP (Stopping Tobacco Organizations and Products) produced a report revealing Philip Morris International's real intentions regarding its "A World Without Smoke" campaign, which helps open our eyes to what is happening.

We also want to inform you that the tobacco control community in Spain has offered the Teguise City Council its strongest support to work with it to reorient the "La Graciosa sin humo" campaign from a public health and environmental viewpoint, without the collaboration of PMI and without putting the island at the service of economic interests outside its own and the interests of the general population. We cannot allow Philip Morris International, which is whitewashing its image to promote its products, to exploit the public bodies that represent citizens.

We have invited the Teguise City Council to promote the island in a way that would be attractive to tourism by taking the steps necessary to consider it free of tobacco smoke and aerosols from heated tobacco products and devices capable of releasing nicotine. This would avoid the bad press the island would get internationally when news spreads that it is collaborating with a tobacco company. Up to this point, the Teguise City Council has not accepted our offer and has decided nonetheless to continue collaborating with the tobacco company.

For all the reasons given above, the undersigned organizations request that your government act urgently to get the Teguise City Council to break the agreement it has with the tobacco company, thus preventing your government from violating Article 5.3 of the World Health Organization's FCTC (Framework Convention on the Control of Tobacco), which strikes us as something extremely serious. We believe that this will also be understood by the international bodies to which a copy of this letter has also been sent:

- World Health Organization (WHO)
- World Health Organization, regional office for EUROPE
- Pan American Health Organization (PAHO)
- Secretariat of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC)
- Secretariat of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
- Secretariat of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP)

- United Nations Global Compact
- Special Rapporteur on the right to physical and mental health of the UN Human Rights Council

With confidence that your government will act to prevent this travesty, we await confirmation of the actions your government will take in this regard. In the meantime, you have our support.

Best wishes,