



STOPPING TOBACCO
ORGANIZATIONS & PRODUCTS

COVID-19
Monitoring
Brief



Global



STOP COVID-19 Monitoring Brief: The tobacco industry, its interests and allies

Edition 6: Covering the period
June 13 - June 27, 2020

July 2, 2020

This update from [STOP, a global tobacco industry watchdog](#), is not intended as a comprehensive list of all TI responses, but as a chance to share the trends and emerging patterns observed from multiple sources. We invite readers to [share information](#) or leads about additional examples or new trends. Next issue: July 30, 2020.

Major Trends in the Fourth Monitoring Period

- Latest CSR activity and academic research analysing industry CSR tactics.
- Impacts of the pandemic on the Heated Tobacco Product market.
- South Africa court case brought by FITA against tobacco ban is dismissed. BAT case delayed.
- Tobacco farmers and workers neglected by industry.

STOP is regularly updating the [COVID-19 Action Center with articles that chart how the tobacco industry is taking advantage of the global pandemic](#).

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

- Reemtsma, a subsidiary of Imperial Tobacco, has paid for accommodation for 250 homeless people in Hamburg, Germany.¹
- In Zambia, JTI donated 150,000 USD worth of PPE supplies to schools and clinics.²
- PMI has donated medical supplies to a hospital in Jalisco, Mexico, with government Trade and Health ministers present during the donation event.³
- [This report](#) by The Niche Newspaper, Nigeria details the marketing and CSR campaigns by tobacco companies to take advantage of the pandemic and compares the tactic to industry behaviour during the Ebola epidemic.
- Academic research by Girvalaki et al. from the European Network for Smoking and Tobacco Prevention, details the industries CSR activity in Europe, describing it as a 'trojan horse', urging governments to uphold Article 5.3 of the WHO FCTC.⁴

Additional Resources

GGTC's [list](#) of country specific tobacco industry donations during COVID-19 between March and May.

Tobacco Industry Business During Pandemic

The global Heated Tobacco Products market is predicted to grow despite the COVID-19 pandemic, with positive impacts for the major tobacco companies. Analysis from market.us suggests that “aggressively promoting” HTP products as low risk is proving a successful strategy during the pandemic period.⁵

Tobacco Regulation

[South Africa](#) tobacco ban:

- The Guateng High Court in Pretoria dismissed the case brought by the Fair Trade Tobacco Association (FITA) against the tobacco ban. The ban remains in place.⁶
- Judge Mlambo said that they were persuaded by Minister of Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs, Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma’s arguments that cigarettes are “plainly not food, cleaning and hygiene products, fuel and clearly not medical products. They would constitute ‘essential goods’ only if they could be considered ‘basic goods’ akin to airtime and electricity,”⁷ Dlamini Zuma argues that the ban was necessary to protect the health care system.⁸ FITA will appeal the decision.
- BAT South Africa is also going to court to challenge the ban, arguing that there have been negative economic impacts and an increase in illicit trade.⁹ BAT’s court date has been postponed from June 30 to August 5. BAT described the delay as “inexplicable” amid concerns that smokers will switch to cheaper brands if a recession hits.¹⁰
- Border patrols between South Africa and Zimbabwe have been increased to combat the rise in cigarette smuggling occurring across the border.¹¹ Illicit trade expert, ex-South African Revenue Service lawyer, Telita Snyckers, has said “What seems to be the case is that 25% of the current illicit market during the lockdown is being supplied by BAT (British American Tobacco),”¹² Historically the industry uses smuggling to supply restricted markets.¹³

In Lebanon, the decision to ease COVID-19 restrictions on tobacco waterpipe use by the Minister for Tourism and reportedly encouraged by the hospitality sector has been

met by disagreement and a petition against the decision signed by doctors, lawyers and other professionals.¹⁴

Additional Resources

GGTC’s list of bans and contemplated bans per country:
[Bans/ Contemplated Bans on Tobacco/ Vaping Products](#)

TobaccoTactics.com – [General Industry Lobbying Tactics](#)

STOP - [The Tobacco Industry’s Subversive Lobbying During COVID-19](#)

Tobacco Workers

In Malawi, tobacco farmers say their earnings have fallen because they are not allowed to attend auctions and negotiate prices due to COVID-19 restrictions. The farmers associations that represent them at auction disagree, saying they operate fairly. Tobacco is a major cash crop in Malawi.¹⁵ The industry has a history of pushing a narrative of support for farmers whilst in reality farmers remain impoverished.¹⁶

The Tobacco Free Association of Zambia investigated farming practices at farms supplying Japan Tobacco International and found dangerous practices, with a lack of COVID-19 precautions and children exposed to dangerous pesticides and green tobacco. This investigation was reported on by STOP [here](#), highlighting that JTI has tried to improve its public image during the pandemic via CSR donations. Subsequent outreach to media in Zambia has resulted in [stories](#) countering JTI’s CSR narrative.

Are you seeing tobacco industry misconduct or tobacco worker safety issues related to COVID-19? [Report it here](#).

Academic Research of Industry Relevance

- Doctors in Indonesia have warned of high mortality among children with COVID-19 and linked this to poor nutrition, weak health care systems and high smoking and second hand smoking rates.¹⁷ STOP is pushing to hold the industry financially accountable for the burden placed upon health care systems in countries like Indonesia.¹⁸

- Research in Italy found that changes in psychological habits and confinement to the home during lockdown helped people modify behaviours and reduced daily consumption of cigarettes and e-cigarettes.¹⁹ This could be a useful finding to combat tobacco industry influence in the country and industry narratives around COVID-19 and quitting.²⁰
- A review paper from the University of Mainz published in the European Heart Journal details the health impacts of cigarettes, e-cigs and waterpipes, concluding that these products “may contribute to an increased burden of symptoms due to coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) and to severe health consequences.”²¹
- The British media has reported on the Mainz paper,²² with some articles downplaying the findings, saying: “hospital records have also suggested smokers who do catch the virus are no more likely to need intensive care, be hooked up to a ventilator or die.”, again underreporting the large body of evidence that shows increased COVID-19 severity and mortality for smokers.²³

Additional Resources

[Data that Smoking Doesn't Worsen Covid-19 is Full of Errors](#)

[The Union: COVID-19](#) – Bi-weekly brief on the science of smoking and COVID-19 under FAQ's section

Future Briefings

We welcome any contributions on issues mentioned in this update or anything related to COVID-19 and the Tobacco Industry. Contact us at bath@exposetobacco.org. The next update will be on July 30, 2020.

Visit the [Tobacco Tactics COVID-19](#) page for further information.

Acknowledgements

The Union Latin America team and Salud Justa for providing information on CSR activity in Mexico

Brenda Chitindi from Tobacco Free Association of Zambia who has worked very closely with STOP investigate tobacco farming in Zambia.

Telita Snyckers for her work on South Africa's illicit tobacco trade.

Endnotes

- 1 <https://www.reemtsma.com/das-unternehmen/presse-meldungen/corona-krise-reemtsma-finanziert-einzelunterkuenfte-fuer-bis-zu-250-hamburger-obdachlose/>
- 2 <https://zambia.co.zm/?s=JTI>
- 3 <https://expansion.mx/empresas/2020/06/12/philip-morris-dona-equipo-medico-a-hospital-de-jalisco>
- 4 <http://www.tobaccopreventioncessation.com/Social-responsibility-during-the-COVID-19-pandemic-Tobacco-Industry-s-trojan-horse,123244,0,2.html>
- 5 <https://market.us/report/heated-tobacco-products-https-market/request-sample/#overview>
- 6 <https://www.iol.co.za/pretoria-news/news/pretoria-high-court-stubs-out-fita-case-cigarette-ban-stands-50011299>
- 7 <https://www.iol.co.za/pretoria-news/news/pretoria-high-court-stubs-out-fita-case-cigarette-ban-stands-50011299>
- 8 <https://www.news24.com/fin24/economy/illegal-cigarette-trade-may-reduce-economic-harm-of-tobacco-ban-govt-in-court-papers-20200620>
- 9 <https://www.iol.co.za/news/politics/fight-on-tobacco-ban-turns-into-blame-game-after-judgment-50051139>
- 10 <https://www.ft.com/content/5a5d3511-e5fa-4b04-b02e-800218de4cba>
- 11 <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/jun/26/south-africa-tobacco-ban-greeted-with-cigarette-smuggling-boom>
- 12 <https://www.iol.co.za/news/politics/tobacco-ban-possibly-dangerous-for-smokers-buying-illicit-cigarettes-says-ex-sars-lawyer-49797284>
- 13 <https://tobaccotactics.org/wiki/tobacco-smuggling/#:~:text=The%20industry%20uses%20smuggling%20as,the%20state%20owned%20tobacco%20company>
- 14 <https://twitter.com/rimanakkash/status/1273573843244900353>
- 15 <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1693466/business-economy>
- 16 <https://tobaccotactics.org/wiki/tobacco-farming/>
- 17 <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-06-18/why-are-so-many-indonesian-children-dying-from-coronavirus/12356444>
- 18 <https://exposetobacco.org/news/stop-statement-covid-accountability/>
- 19 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7270632/>
- 20 https://www.planetofthevapes.co.uk/news/vaping-news/2020-05-12_covid-stress-increases-tobacco-use.html
- 21 <https://academic.oup.com/eurheartj/article/doi/10.1093/eurheartj/ehaa460/5861975>
- 22 <https://www.thescottishsun.co.uk/news/5743295/vaping-no-better-than-cigarettes-research/>
- 23 <https://www.qeios.com/read/UJR2AW.5>