

Cigarette firms slowing anti-tobacco fight: report

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Alleged "interference" by cigarette firms in public health policies is slowing down a UN-backed global campaign against tobacco use and its related health risks, a report said Tuesday.

The report by the civil society group Framework Convention Alliance said major cigarette firms continue to run circles around key provisions of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), the global tobacco treaty.

The [tobacco industry](#) is a major revenue earner and employer in some countries, but its use comes with major health risks.

According to the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO), [tobacco use](#) kills nearly six million people each year, including more than 600,000 who are non-smokers but exposed to second-hand smoke.

The UN health watchdog said on its website that unless urgent action is taken, the annual death toll could rise to more than eight million by 2030.

"Tobacco industry interference in public health policy poses the single greatest threat to the global community realising the full potential of the FCTC's life-saving measures," the report said.

"Now is a critical time to break the tobacco industry's stranglehold over [public health policy](#)," said the report entitled Tobacco Watch 2012.

"It's also time to put in place precedent-setting checks and balances over the political influence of this profit-driven industry."

Cigarette companies were not immediately available for comment on the report, released on the sidelines of a conference on tobacco and health in Singapore.

Article 5.3 of the global tobacco treaty, which came into force seven years ago under the auspices of the WHO, binds signatory states to take measures to shield their public health policies from the influence of cigarette firms.

It bars governments from partnering with cigarette companies to promote public health issues and allowing marketing schemes that usually come in the guise of [corporate social responsibility](#) (CSR) campaigns.

Signatory governments should neither invest in the tobacco industry, accept contributions from cigarette firms nor appoint any industry representatives in tobacco control bodies, according to the treaty.

Applicants to government positions relating to [public health](#) must also disclose any previous association with the tobacco industry.

Despite some progress, many of the treaty's provisions have yet to be fully implemented and countries needed to "rededicate" themselves to fulfilling their obligations, the report said.

A key hurdle is the influence held by major cigarette firms.

"Of particular concern are former tobacco industry officials serving in health ministries, or acting as official government consultants," the report said.

Another concern is cigarette firms circumventing advertising bans on tobacco by running programmes in the guise of CSR campaigns.

"Tobacco industry activities like those reported in Tobacco Watch do more than violate Article 5.3 of the FCTC. They impede progress on implementing all other measures in the convention," said alliance director Laurent Huber.

Lawsuits were also another way companies are fighting [tobacco control](#), Huber said.

Last December, [tobacco](#) giant Philip Morris stepped up its legal campaign against an Australian law banning logos and branding from cigarette packs, saying it had taken its case to the High Court.

Philip Morris said the law, which requires cigarettes to be sold in drab, olive-brown packets, impinged on its intellectual property rights.

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