

The “socially responsible tobacco company” – another misleading descriptor.

- INGCAT's position on tobacco companies' involvement in health and welfare projects, adopted by INGCAT member organisations May 2004.

Statement

Tobacco is grown by the poor, processed by low-paid workers, sold by the poor and used by the poor, the majority of whom stay poor and get sick while generating wealth for the shareholders of a few multinational companiesⁱ. INGCAT's member organisations are on the front line tackling the diseases and deprivation that tobacco company products inflict on the world's poor. Our patients often cannot afford the treatments they need, or even basic foods, because they have used their scarce resources on tobacco companies' products.

Tobacco companies, whose products are now killing 4.9 million people every year, are embarking on so-called “Corporate Social Responsibility” (CSR) programmes, focusing on selected health and welfare issues to distract attention from their own products' devastating impact on health and welfare of the world's poor.

INGCAT member organisations believe that the only meaningful way tobacco companies can help improve the health and welfare of poor people is to stay out of it – stop promoting deadly products to these populations, stop trapping them in a trade that inhibits their economic development, stop undermining effective tobacco control policies that will address these populations' real needs. NGOs' responsibility is to protect the interests of their beneficiaries: partnerships that promote the interests of tobacco companies as they currently operate are incompatible with that duty. INGCAT members therefore refuse to support, endorse or co-operate with tobacco companies' CSR activities on health or poverty relief, and call on other health and welfare organisations to join us in this stance.

Rationale:

- The purpose of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programmes is to improve business outcomesⁱⁱ. For tobacco companies this means selling more tobacco products. This is in fundamental conflict with the purpose of genuine health and welfare programmes.
- The main techniques of CSR are to acquire credibility by association with respected organisations, and to annexe or silence potential criticsⁱⁱⁱ. These techniques compromise the integrity and independence of NGOs, and damage the interests of their beneficiaries.
- Tobacco companies choose to address important issues like domestic violence and hunger in their CSR welfare programmes, while simultaneously targeting the same suffering populations as customers^{iv} and thereby adding to their problems.
- The diseases tobacco companies choose to include in their health programmes (e.g. malaria, HIV), while also important health issues, are also chosen to distract attention from tobacco-related disease in the same populations. Where tobacco-related diseases are addressed, like TB, the role of tobacco is neglected.
- Tobacco companies' expenditure on poverty relief and health care projects is dwarfed and mocked by their pro-smoking marketing to the same populations, and by their

expenditure on publicising such activity in self-promotional communications such as annual reports and corporate advertising^v.

- The “relief” tobacco companies provide through CSR programmes is of no consequence compared to the damage their products inflict in the same populations.
- Tobacco marketing campaigns present the poor with aspirational images of smoking as an activity of the rich and healthy – the truth is that tobacco use undermines both health and wealth.
- Tobacco is a drain on all types of economy, from the households who use it to the agencies and governments who have to deal with its health and environmental consequences. Even in tobacco growing countries, tobacco is less profitable to farmers and more damaging to the environment than alternative cash or food cropsⁱ.

While these realities continue, there can be no common purpose between tobacco companies and health or welfare organisations.

References

ⁱ [Tobacco and Poverty](#): a vicious circle. WHO, Geneva, 2004

ⁱⁱ “By supporting broader economic and social development, [businesses] turn poor and excluded people into customers and employees, and neglected areas into new markets and new sources of supply. By improving local communities they obtain greater quality and reliability from their partners in local supply chains. There is business sense in the virtuous circle.”

- [World Bank Institute teaching materials](#) on CSR and poverty relief.

ⁱⁱⁱ “Many companies find that community involvement can reduce local regulatory obstacles, provide access to the local political process, generate positive media coverage, and increase access to markets for their products and services.”

- [Business for Social Responsibility](#), Issue briefing on Community Investment.

^{iv} [How do you sell death?](#) Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids

^v For example, in 2002 BAT spent £12.63 million on charitable and community donations, compared with £50 million on its Formula 1 sponsorship alone. Philip Morris International has a global marketing budget of \$350 million, almost double the amount the whole Altria group distributed in grants to good causes (\$138 million, mostly within the USA). (Altria website www.altria.com , accessed May 2004)

Signatory List:

(If your organisation wishes to endorse this statement, please email info@ingcat.org .)

- International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease
- International Union Against Cancer
- World Heart Federation
- European Respiratory Society
- Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids, USA
- Bay Area African American Chapters, USA (view their [formal resolution](#) and [website](#))
- ASH Finland
- Cyprus Non Smokers League
- SocialNEEDS Network, Kenya
- ASH Scotland
- The Environmental Action Network, Uganda
- The InterAmerican Heart Foundation
- Kaunas Drug Abuse Help Centre for Youth, Lithuania
- Centre for Tobacco Free Education and Development, Kenya
- Tobacco Control Alliance in Georgia
- Georgian National Counter Tobacco Centre
- FCTC Implementation and Monitoring Centre in Georgia
- National Consumers and Environmental Association of Togo
- Turkish National Committee on Tobacco and Health
- International Network of Women Against Tobacco