



Press Release

Contact:

US: Cloe Franko, cfranko@stopcorporateabuse.org, +1 (617) 695-2525

GER: Sonja von Eichborn, eichborn@unfairtobacco.org, +49 (30) 694-6101 [for German comments]

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International Labour Organization forced to address conflict of interest

Responding to mounting pressure, UN agency to consider severing ties with the tobacco industry

Berlin, Germany—On Wednesday, 15 March, the International Labour Organization (ILO) will vote on whether to cut ties with Big Tobacco. The decision, which will be closely monitored by public health leaders around the globe, could remove one of the tobacco industry's final avenues of influence to the United Nations.

The vote comes as public health, labor, and human rights communities have [escalated their call](#) for the ILO to extricate itself from Big Tobacco, one of the deadliest industries on the planet. Since 2015, the ILO has received more than \$15 million USD from [Japan Tobacco International](#) and [other tobacco corporations](#) for programs that [boost](#) the industry's public relations yet do little to curb child labor violations in tobacco fields.

"The ILO cannot do its job if it is in the pocket of Big Tobacco," said **Cloe Franko, senior international organizer with the Challenge Big Tobacco campaign at Corporate Accountability International**. "We urge the ILO to recognize the tobacco industry for what it is: a champion for its bottom line and an obstacle for workers' rights and public health."

United Nations officials, including the Secretariat to the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) have also [called on the ILO to distance itself from the tobacco industry](#). The ILO's coziness with the tobacco industry violates a [core tenet of the FCTC](#), which establishes a firewall between the tobacco industry and public health policymaking.

"For years, we have been raising awareness about tobacco industry strategies such as so called CSR activities. We are calling on the ILO to join other UN agencies in distancing itself from Big Tobacco," said **Sonja von Eichborn, director of Unfairtobacco at BLUE 21**. "On Wednesday, the ILO has the opportunity to stand on the right side of history, and protect workers over corporate profits."

In countries like Malawi, Indonesia, Brazil, and even the USA, the tobacco industry purchases tobacco leaf produced by using child labor. The [list of goods produced with child or forced labor](#) published by the US Department of Labor includes 15 more countries, where child labor in tobacco growing (and bidi production) is obvious.

Germany could play a decisive role. As a leading cigarette exporter, the country is host to factories of all major tobacco corporations. In the ILO Governing Body, Germany holds a non-elective member seat as a State of chief industrial importance. It could use its power to take a stand for public health as well as for labor and human rights.

Founded in 1919, the ILO brings together [governments, employers, and workers](#) to set international labor standards.

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[Unfairtobacco](#) is a project run by BLUE21 in Berlin, focussing on the social, economic and ecological impact of tobacco in the Global South.

Unfairtobacco

c/o BLUE 21 | Gneisenaustr. 2a | 10961 Berlin | Germany | tel. +49 (30) 694 6101 | info@unfairtobacco.org