

Press release of Corporate Accountability International (CAI) and Unfairtobacco
Berlin, 16 October 2017

International Labour Organization forced to address conflict of interest

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

In the latest in a series of high-profile disaffiliations, the International Labour Organization (ILO) will decide whether it, too, will finally sever ties with Big Tobacco. The decision, set to come at its governing body meeting this month, could shut one of the tobacco industry's last remaining avenues of influence to the United Nations.

Ahead of this decision public health and labour leaders around the globe delivered a [letter this week to government representatives](#) of the ILO Governing Body calling on them to end the ILO's public-private partnerships with the tobacco industry. Global public health leaders from the [Secretariat of the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control \(WHO FCTC\)](#) to [global tobacco control organizations](#) have long called for the ILO to shut its doors to Big Tobacco.

"For years, we have been exposing how the tobacco industry harms farmers and how Big Tobacco still presents itself as development agent in tobacco growing countries," said **Sonja von Eichborn, director of Unfairtobacco at BLUE 21 in Berlin**. "The ILO now has the opportunity to do the right thing and protect workers instead of irresponsible corporate profit-making."

In the past 15 years, the ILO has received more than 15 million USD from tobacco corporations for joint programs, including more than 10 million USD from Japan Tobacco International for its so called ARISE program. Tobacco corporations promote these programs to [boost their public relations](#).

But such CSR programs, also implemented by the industry funded Eliminating Child Labour in Tobacco Growing Foundation (ECLT), do little to curb child labour in tobacco fields, because they do not shift the tobacco industry-driven cycle of poverty for tobacco farmers that forces children into the fields - as explained by the [Tobacco and Allied Workers Union of Malawi](#) (TOAWUM).

The ILO's coziness with the tobacco industry violates a [core tenet of the WHO FCTC](#), which establishes a firewall between the tobacco industry and public health policymaking. [Internal industry documents](#) show that tobacco companies view the ILO as a gateway to undermine public health.

"Big Tobacco has become such a pariah even corporate groups like UN Global Compact and the International Tax and Investment Center have been forced to cut ties," said **Cloe Franko, senior international organizer with the Challenge Big Tobacco campaign at Corporate Accountability International**. "It's time for the ILO to follow suit and recognize the harms Big Tobacco poses to public health, workers, and the environment and end its partnerships with the industry."

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We expose how tobacco industry harms farmers, consumers and the environment
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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. The German government could use its power to take a stand for public health as well as for labour and human rights.

Founded in 1919, the ILO brings together governments, employers, and workers to set international labour standards.

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