

# PMI event sponsorship "tantamount to tobacco advertising" - civil society orgs

Eleven South African civil society organisations have joined [35 organisations from 23 countries across Africa](#) to denounce the inclusion of Philip Morris International (PMI) as one of the sponsors of the Africa Trade & Customs Week Summit, scheduled to take place in Johannesburg from 7 November to 9 November 2022.



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The local civil society signatories include Cancer Association of SA; Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa; SAMRC Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Research Unit; Tobacco Alcohol and Gambling Advisory Advocacy; South African Tobacco Free Youth Forum; Department of Paediatrics and Child Health at UCT; Research Unit on the Economics of Excisable Products at UCT; Africa Centre for Tobacco Industry Monitoring and Policy Research; South African Non-Communicable Disease Alliance; The SAMRC/Wits Centre for Health Economics and Decision Science; and National Council Against Smoking.

On 13 October, a letter informing the Department of Health of the situation requested that government respond to the matter. A similar request was sent to South African government bodies, including the Department of Finance, the Department of Trade and Industry, the Department of International Relations and the Deputy President of South Africa.

A letter was further sent to Dadem Investments, the event host, requesting the withdrawal of PMI sponsorship and removal of PMI logos from the event materials.

“Tobacco company sponsorship of activities in South Africa is tantamount to tobacco advertising, which is clearly prohibited in South Africa. Advertising and such promotion enhance the social acceptability of both tobacco companies and smoking, which is a serious public health problem as it promotes tobacco use and undermines public health,” says Sharon Nyatsanza, deputy director of the National Council Against Smoking.

“This is why government departments, and officials and UN agencies, especially those in customs-related work, should not attend this event if PMI sponsorship is not withdrawn. Attending would endorse PMI, one of the largest cigarette manufacturers, overlook the violation of national laws and government’s international commitments under the World Health Organization’s Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC).”

## Signed petition

A petition dated 21 October was sent to relevant bodies, signed by organisations across Africa.

The organisations note that they “are concerned by this sponsorship because it is a total violation of the World Health Organization’s Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), the first international treaty negotiated under the auspices of WHO in response to the globalisation of the tobacco epidemic, and an evidence-based treaty that reaffirms the right of all people to the highest standard of health. It is also a violation of South Africa’s current legislation on tobacco control, the Tobacco Products Control Act 83 of 1993 (as amended).”

The petition states that as a party to the FCTC, South Africa is bound to respect the guidelines for implementation of Article 5.3 of the Convention which highlights that parties should not accept, support or endorse the tobacco industry organising, promoting, participating in, or performing, youth, public education or any initiatives that are directly or indirectly related to tobacco control.

It also spotlights South Africa’s current legislation which states that “No manufacturer, importer, distributor or retailer of tobacco products shall organise or promote any organised activity that is to take place in whole or in part in the Republic, nor make any financial contribution to any organised activity that is to take place, or is taking place, or has taken place in whole or in part in the Republic.”



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## UN agencies urged to intervene

The petition brings to light the model policy for agencies of the United Nations system on preventing tobacco industry interference, which requires the United Nations system, including the intergovernmental agencies that are observers to COP and members of the UN Inter Agency Task Force to “reject partnerships, joint programmes, non-binding or non-enforceable agreements and any other voluntary arrangements with the tobacco industry.”

As such, it calls on organisations that are covered by this policy and are expected to intervene during the Africa Trade & Customs Week Summit to withdraw their engagement if Philip Morris International remains connected in any way to the summit. These organisations are: World Customs Organization, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, World Trade Organization, International Trade Centre, International Finance Corporation (World Bank Group) and United Nations Economic Commission for Africa.

Noting that this occurs at a time when South Africa's Tobacco Products and Electronic Delivery Systems Control Bill is heading to parliament for vote into law, the organisations suspect that "the move by Philip Morris International to sponsor such a major summit is a strategy to gain access to the competent revenue services to influence government policy".

The organisations have called on South Africa to rather ensure effective implementation of the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products, which lays down steps to effectively track and trace the movement of tobacco products across and within borders. South Africa has not progressed with implementation of the Protocol which it signed in 2013.

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