

Press Release

## Joint Statement Of Concern On Shrinking Civil Society Space And Increasing Private Sector Exclusivity At UN

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Disgrace at the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

Big Alcohol, Big Oil and Big Pharma hold meeting in the heart of the UN  
***New York, United Nations, July 19, 2018 – Civil society groups express deep concern about presence of harmful industries at the United Nations and during the UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development***

On July 12, 2018, front groups for Big Alcohol, Big Oil and Big Pharma were inexplicably granted access into the heart of the UN to host a side event as part of the official program of the UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development ([HLPF](#)).

The HLPF is the premier body of the United Nations to assess and discuss the implementation of the Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). [1] The HLPF is convening at the United Nations in New York between July 10-18, bringing together more than 2000 participants from civil society and other stakeholder groups with more than 100 ministers from governments around the world. The purpose of the meeting is to jointly assess global and national progress and challenges in achieving the SDGs. During the eight days of the HLPF, a total of 190 side events are being organized. And here is where it gets ugly.

**Two front groups for some of the most harmful industries in the world joined with the UN Office of Partnerships to host a [side event about private sector](#) initiatives to promote sustainable development.** [2] Masquerading as a “not-for-profit” organization, the International Alliance for Responsible Drinking (IARD) is the lobby arm representing 11 of the biggest alcohol producers in the world [3], while GBCHealth is the front group for Big Oil, Big Pharma and other industries harmful to health and development. [4]

**The fact that private sector invitation-only events take place in the heart of the UN is deeply concerning.** In this way, well-funded private sector front groups are able to monopolize the conversation on matters of public concern, further fueling problems of intransparency and monopolizing the definition of problems and accepted solutions.

**Harmful industries should have no place at discussions about solutions to the problems that their products, business models and business practices are causing in the first place.**

In a time of shrinking space for civil society, front groups funded by harmful industries can pay their way to prime access to the UN and decision-makers. The event was held in the UN Secretariat Building, West Terrace, where only few can afford to rent meeting rooms and other associated costs. Basic analysis of the official HLPF program shows that only about 20% of all side events list civil society groups as primary organizer. Many civil society event applications were rejected and therefore had to find affordable space outside UN premises.

**This event is also deeply concerning because alcohol is a massive obstacle to development,** adversely affecting 13 of 17 SDGs, killing one human being every 10 seconds, fueling poverty, inequality, violence, including gender-based violence, and vast economic and productivity losses. [5] [6] The corporations represented by the IARD have a horrific track record of human rights abuses [7], exploitation of women and girls [8], use of tax avoidance schemes [9] [10], [institutional ties with the tobacco](#) and other harmful industries [11] [12], marketing techniques and strategies that expose children, adolescents and youth to alcohol [13], and misrepresentation of the science about the harmfulness of their products [14].

All of these corporations attack evidence-based and WHO-recommended public policies and interventions that help save and improve lives by reducing and preventing alcohol harm – because these policies would jeopardize their profits. [15]

Extractive industries, like Big Oil, often undermine effective measures against climate change and for transformation towards sustainable development. The adverse effects of their business practices extend across the SDGs. [16]

**These facts clearly show the conflict of interest at work when harmful industries like Big Alcohol and Big Oil engage in conversations about health and development.**

However, at the side event, which was part of the official HLPF program, none of these facts could be highlighted because the event was invitation only, excluding selected civil society groups. And so, in the heart of the UN and during a most important meeting to discuss obstacles to sustainable development, harmful industries were able to spread misinformation and propaganda.

**As civil society groups, representing communities affected by the harms these industries cause to people, families and societies worldwide, we are deeply concerned about this event and what it represents.**

We are concerned about the absence of quality standards for HLPF side events. We are also concerned about the lack of conflict of interest safeguards.

We strongly oppose the shrinking space for civil society and ever increasing platforms for harmful private interests. We are against the role of the UN Office of Partnerships, promoting harmful industries that undermine and attack policies and guidelines of other UN agencies.

We are concerned about Human Rights compliance of harmful industries and their attempts to use the United Nations to white and green wash the real harms they cause to human and planetary health and well-being.

**We are concerned about the integrity and effectiveness of the HLPF and our collective ability to find the most comprehensive solutions to achieve sustainable development for all, not just for a few corporate giants.**

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## *Signatories:*

1. *Action on Smoking and Health Foundation (ASH Thailand)*
2. *Afrihealth Optonet Association, Nigeria*
3. *AfriYan, Africa*
4. *Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND)*
5. *Association PROI, Bosnia and Herzegovina*
6. *Association pour l'Action de Développement Communautaire (AADC), Burundi*
7. *Both ENDS, The Netherlands*
8. *Brot fuer die Welt, Germany*
9. *Dr. Uzo Adirieje Foundation (DUZAFOUND), Nigeria*
10. *European Network of Migrant Women (ENOMW), Europe*
11. *Franciscans International*
12. *Gestos, Brazil*
13. *Ghana NCD Alliance*
14. *Global Policy Forum (GPF)*
15. *Health and Trade Network*
16. *Humanitaire Plus, Togo*
17. *International Alliance of Women*
18. *International Blue Cross*
19. *International Federation of Settlements and Neighborhood Centers*
20. *International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease (The Union)*
21. *IOGT International*
22. *IRTECO, Tanzania, EastAfrica*
23. *JAD (Justice, Action and Development) Foundation-Pakistan*
24. *Kawempe Youth Development Association (KYDA), Uganda*
25. *KRuHA, Indonesia*
26. *Labour, Health and Human Rights Development Centre, Nigeria*
27. *Nonviolence International*

28. *ONG Humanitaire Plus, Togo*
29. *PROGGA Knowledge for Progress, Bangladesh*
30. *Reacción Climática, Bolivia*
31. *Rezwan Alam, Bangladesh*
32. *Save the Climate, Democratic Republic of Congo*
33. *SDG Watch Europe*
34. *Sisters of Charity Federation, North America*
35. *Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, Italy*
36. *Social Watch, Uruguay*
37. *Society for Conservation and Sustainability of Energy and Environment in Nigeria (SOCSEEN)*
38. *Society for International Development (SID)*
39. *Somali Youth Development Foundation (SYDF)*
40. *Southeast Asia Tobacco Control Alliance (SEATCA)*
41. *Southern African Alcohol Policy Alliance (SAAPA)*
42. *Transdiaspora Network, Inc., United States*
43. *Uganda Youth Development Link (UYDEL), Uganda*
44. *Unfairtobacco, Germany*
45. *Youth For Environment Education And Development Foundation (YFEED), Nepal*
46. *Vision for Alternative Development, Ghana*

### *Notes to the editor:*

*What are the Sustainable Development Goals?*

*Adopted in 2015 by the governments of the world, the 2030 Agenda contains 17 Sustainable Development Goals with 169 targets. The 17 SDGs cover all three aspects of sustainable human development: the social, environmental and economic dimension.*

*What is the High-Level Political Forum?*

*The [High-level Political Forum](#), United Nations central platform for follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals,*

*provides for the full and effective participation of all States Members of the United Nations and States members of specialized agencies.*

*The high-level political forum on sustainable development is meeting from Monday, 9 July, to Wednesday, 18 July 2018. The ministerial meeting of the forum is from Monday, 16 July, to Wednesday, 18 July 2018.*

*The theme is: “Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies”.*

*The HLPF is also reviewing progress towards the SDGS and focusing in particular on:*

- *Goal 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all*
- *Goal 7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all*
- *Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable*
- *Goal 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns*
- *Goal 15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss*
- *Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, that will be considered each year.*

*The first week includes numerous panel and roundtables on the theme and on the SDGs under review.*

*List of references:*

*[1] Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform: [HLPF 2018](#)*

*[2] HLPF Side Event by harmful industry front groups: [Changing Attitudes](#)*

*[3] [Corporations funding the IARD](#): 11 major alcohol producers*

*[4] [Corporations funding the GBC Health](#): Big Alcohol Big Oil, Big Pharma all in the same boat*

*[5] Example of divestments from alcohol industry: [ASN Bank divests from Heineken](#)*

*[6] [WHO Global Status Report](#) on Alcohol and Health, 2014*

*[7] [Collection of cases](#) of Human Rights abuses by Big Alcohol, including: [Amnesty International](#): Global beer giant pays Myanmar military*

- [8] Olivier van Beemen: [Heineken in Africa](#), and the Heineken [company profile](#)
- [9] Action Aid: [Calling time – why SABMiller should stop dodging taxes in Africa](#)
- [10] [Diageo company profile](#)
- [11] Jiang N, Ling P. Alliance between tobacco and alcohol industries to shape public policy. *Addiction* (Abingdon, England). 2013;108(5):852-864. doi:10.1111/add.12134.
- [12] Benjamin Hawkins, Chris Holden, Jappe Eckhardt & Kelley Lee (2016): Reassessing policy paradigms: A comparison of the global tobacco and alcohol industries, *Global Public Health*, DOI: 10.1080/17441692.2016.1161815
- [13] *Addiction*, [Volume 112, Issue S1, Supplement](#): The Regulation of Alcohol Marketing: From Research to Public Health Policy, January 2017
- [14] Roni Caryn Rabin (2018): [It Was Supposed to Be an Unbiased Study of Drinking. They Wanted to Call It 'Cheers.'](#), *New York Times*, June 18, 2018
- [15] Whitaker Kasi, Webb Douglas, Linou Natalia. [Commercial influence in control of non-communicable diseases](#), *BMJ* 2018; 360:k110
- [16] Barbara Adams, Roberto Bissio, Chee Yoke Ling, Kate Donald, Jens Martens, Stefano Prato, Sandra Vermuyten (editors): [Spotlight on Sustainable Development 2018. Exploring new policy pathways: How to overcome obstacles and contradictions in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda](#), Report by the Civil Society Reflection Group on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 2018