



**African Tobacco  
Control Alliance**

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**REF: ES/SPR/041/10**

## **MEDIA RELEASE: 12 April 2010**

**For immediate release**

### **African health group welcome Gates Foundation action to shield public health policies from tobacco industry interference.**

The African Tobacco Control Alliance (ATCA) today welcomed the decision of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to terminate a multimillion dollar grant to a leading international health research agency because of the potential of tobacco industry influence on the agency's policies.

ATCA, a coalition of African tobacco control organizations had announced on Wednesday that it was pulling out from a planned Pan-African tobacco control meeting in Dakar which it was to co-host with the Canadian International Development Research Centre (IDRC) after discovering that the IDRC has on the Board of its Directors a person who also serves the interests of tobacco industry. The Dakar meeting was to be financially supported by the Gates Foundation.

Ms Rachel Kitonyo, ATCA chair said , "We are extremely disappointed to discover that Ms. Babara McDougal who is currently the Chair of IDRC board of Directors is also a current chair of the Imperial Tobacco Canada Ltd Corporate Social Responsibility committee and was until last month a Director on the Board of Imperial Tobacco . This is clear conflict of interest and we find it deplorable"

ATCA thanks the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for its principled decision in immediately terminating a contract and partnership with IDRC following this revelation. , The foundation's decision is an important signal to philanthropies and governments that they must be ever vigilant in protecting their policies and programmes from interference by the tobacco industry,

The foundation terminated a US\$ 5.2 million grant to the Canadian International Development Research Centre (IDRC) on Friday after it learnt of

the conflict of interest. The purpose of the grant was to support tobacco control activities in Africa.

The foundation, in a statement, expressed its “deep disappointment” at the revelation and felt that the conflict of interest for the IDRC is “unacceptable” and counter to the foundations work in supporting “meaningful tobacco control programs (sic) in Africa”. The foundation added that it remained committed to tobacco control work and will partner with the anti-tobacco community to reduce tobacco use in Africa.

The African Tobacco Control Alliance (ATCA) welcomes this decision by the Gates Foundation. “In country-after-country the tobacco industry seeks to avoid, delay, dilute and defeat laws and policies designed to reduce tobacco use. It is vital to protect public health policies from tobacco industry interference and the Gates Foundation has shown extraordinary leadership in this regard”, says Ms Kitonyo.

The African continent is a key growth market for tobacco manufacturers and an increase in tobacco use will bring with it addiction, disease, death and an increase in poverty. This is a direct violation of IDRC’s mission of supporting research that will help to build healthier, more equitable, and prosperous societies in lower and middle income countries (LMICs). The chair of the IDRC cannot serve two opposing causes at the same time.

The issue also poses a major challenge to the Canadian government, as the IDRC is a Canadian crown corporation and the government appoints its chair.

ATCA urges all governments to recognize that it is fundamentally wrong to appoint a tobacco industry official to chair a government agency with responsibilities for health.

The IDRC appointment also runs counter to Canada’s obligations under a global tobacco treaty, the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC).

Article 5.3 of the FCTC requires governments to protect public health policies from tobacco industry interference. Furthermore, international guidelines adopted to interpret this obligation require that governments “not allow any person employed by the tobacco industry or any entity working to further its interests to be a member of any government body, committee or advisory group that sets or implements tobacco control or public health policy,”

The IDRC appointment is against both the spirit and the implementation guidelines of the FCTC and the government of Canada which has long been a leader in tobacco control must recognize this.

A 2008 WHO report reviewed the tactics used by tobacco companies to interfere with tobacco control policies. The strategies include direct and indirect political lobbying and campaign contributions, establishing inappropriate relationships with WHO staff, discrediting WHO or WHO

officials, using surrogates, such as front groups and trade unions, distorting scientific research, and buying influence through corporate social responsibility programmes.

ATCA calls on Canada to act quickly to correct the situation and urges all governments to comply with the spirit and letter of Article 5.3 of the FCTC.

**Further information:**

ATCA represents 127 African non-governmental organizations.

<http://atca-africa.org/>

The FCTC guidelines about conflict of interest were adopted in 2008 and can be found at: [http://www.who.int/fctc/guidelines/article\\_5\\_3/en/index.html](http://www.who.int/fctc/guidelines/article_5_3/en/index.html).

A 2008 WHO report, "Tobacco Industry Interference with Tobacco Control", which lists some of the industry's "elaborate, well financed, sophisticated and usually invisible" subversive tactics can be found at

[www.who.int/tobacco/resources/publications/Tobacco%20Industry%20Interference-FINAL.pdf](http://www.who.int/tobacco/resources/publications/Tobacco%20Industry%20Interference-FINAL.pdf)

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