



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

We can build a fairer, healthier Africa when we effectively tackle the maneuvers of the tobacco industry.

Statement of Leonce SESSOU, Executive Secretary, African Tobacco Control Alliance (ATCA) on the occasion of World Health Day 2021

Lomé, 07 April 2021

This year, [World Health Day](#) mandates us to reflect on measures to make the world fairer and healthier. The World Health Organization notes that the world is currently an unequal one because “as COVID-19 has highlighted, some people are able to live healthier lives and have better access to health services than others - entirely due to the conditions in which they are born, grow, live, work and age.” According to the WHO, “This is not only unfair: it is preventable” if everyone has living and working conditions that are conducive to good health, and every individual is able to access quality health services when and where they need them.<sup>1</sup>

As deliberations are undertaken on this subject, we must not forget a major stakeholder that greatly contributes in making the world unfair and unhealthy: the tobacco industry. World Health Day 2021 presents us an opportunity to remind ourselves that [tobacco kills more than 8 million people globally](#) every year, yet over 80% of the world's 1.3 billion tobacco users live in low- and middle-income countries.<sup>2</sup> This is no coincidence, it being the result of the tobacco industry fostering initiatives that make the world further unfair. The industry historically places particular attention to vulnerable groups like the young, the poor, women, targeting them with specific marketing tactics, including “light”, flavored or “reduced harm” products. This of course, only helps to stir addiction.

We must not forget that while the public health community works for the health and wellbeing of the population, the tobacco industry has only one objective; to make profits at all cost, even at the detriment of public health.<sup>3</sup> So the tobacco industry fiercely fights efforts to adopt strong laws that will protect the population of Africa from the dangers of tobacco. It fights to weaken such laws when they are in the development stage, and does everything possible to stall implementation when efforts to block adoption of the laws are thwarted.

The African Tobacco Control Alliance (ATCA) calls on African governments to remember the harm caused by the tobacco industry, and the very significant role it plays in making the world unfair and unhealthy. The burden of the tobacco epidemic far outweighs whatever “gains” the industry seems to provide.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, it will be in Africa’s best interest to prioritize the health of its population. African governments must step up their efforts in the fight against tobacco use. By so doing, they will be contributing to build a fairer, healthier world as requested by the 2021 edition of World Health Day.

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*ATCA is a non-profit, non-political Pan-African network of civil society organizations headquartered in Lome, Togo. With membership in 39 countries, ATCA is dedicated to promoting public health and preventing the tobacco epidemic in the continent.*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.who.int/campaigns/world-health-day/2021>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/tobacco>

<sup>3</sup> <https://untobaccocontrol.org/kh/article-53/tobacco-industry-interference-tii/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.who.int/tobacco/economics/background/en/>