



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**“Ban apps that encourage purchase and consumption of smoking and vaping on the Google Play Store”: A call by ATCA and 178 other Civil Society Organisations**

Lomé 30 October, 2020

The African Tobacco Control Alliance (ATCA) is amongst 179 organizations from 62 countries that have called on Google to implement a policy to prohibit applications that encourage the purchase or consumption of smoking and vaping products in the Play store. A [letter](#) signed by these organisations was sent to Google CEO Sundar Pichai on Wednesday 28 October 2020.

With vaping products heavily and falsely being promoted in Africa as “safer alternatives” to smoking, the need to eliminate advertising of such products within a platform as large as the Google Play store cannot be emphasized enough, as tobacco use kills eight million people worldwide each year, most of them in low and middle-income countries.

Several other tech giants like [Apple](#) and Amazon have already aligned themselves with this policy. Nearly 200 apps were removed from the Apple store following a [November 2019 announcement](#) that the company would prohibit and remove apps promoting the use of tobacco products. Google, which is predominant in Africa, should follow suit.

Leonce Sessou, ATCA’s Executive Secretary notes that “Africa is already bearing huge health and socioeconomic burdens brought about by the tobacco industry. Children are heavily targeted with aggressive marketing of cigarettes by Big Tobacco companies, and the introduction of new technology tobacco products is making a bad situation worse.”

The letter to Google’s CEO highlights how tobacco and nicotine companies have [exploited the COVID-19](#) crisis to market and promote special online and mobile delivery of their products. “This practice which outrightly contravenes the law in some countries facilitates addiction, as even those who might not have known about these products have the opportunity to discover them, order them, and have them delivered all from the comfort of an application downloaded in their mobile phone from the Google Play store” says Leonce.

The African Tobacco Control Alliance is appalled by the many strategies deployed by the tobacco industry to make profits, despite being fully aware of the fact that its products kill. Leonce Sessou says, “It is unfortunate that tech companies have had to be drawn into Big Tobacco’s callous strategies to get people hooked to its products.”

The tobacco industry is the vector of an epidemic which is globally known to be the leading cause of preventable death. African countries must ensure that their citizens are protected from these products. ATCA recommends adoption and full implementation of strong tobacco control policies to help bring this situation under control.

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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 38 countries, ATCA is dedicated to promoting public health and preventing the tobacco epidemic in the continent.*