

PRESS STATEMENT

31 May 2022

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Bin 'Tobacco Trash' for good this World No Tobacco Day 2022

31 May 2022, Tobacco control advocates across the globe gather to celebrate World No tobacco day. This is an annual event to raise awareness of the negative implications of tobacco use. This year's theme aims to educate the public on the importance of protecting our environment from the threat of tobacco. This is important considering the continuous adverse results experienced by the environment across the tobacco cycle which begins from cultivation to post-consumption of tobacco. According to Professor Lekan Ayo-Yusuf, Director of the Africa Centre for Tobacco Industry Monitoring and Policy Research (ATIM) and Chairperson of the School of Health Systems and Public Health at the University of Pretoria, the cumulative effects are gradually being witnessed as it relates to the devastating consequences of climate change and extreme weather events around the world, including the recent flooding in Kwazulu-Natal. Therefore, the environmental impact of tobacco growing and consumption-wastes resulting from activities of the tobacco industry should be of concern to the public as it is to governments. This is especially more concerning for food security when combined with land degradation that results from tobacco cultivation.

Guided by [Article 18](#) of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) Parties have an obligation to protect the environment and the health of persons in respect of tobacco cultivation and manufacture.

Tobacco is known to kill more than 8 million people each year. Given the already complex disease burden faced by Low and middle-income countries in Africa, tobacco production targets these countries placing a major threat not only to the health systems' resilience but also to the countries' socio-economic development by damaging the ecosystem. [Scientific studies](#) show that two main effects of tobacco farming include the release of agrochemicals (fertilizers and pesticides) and deforestation(land clearing). During tobacco curing, 82 000 tons of chemicals are released into the air while about 600million trees are destroyed to produce paper used for cigarettes. Also, in cigarette production and manufacturing, large amounts of water are used contributing to water waste.

Tobacco butts are non-biodegradable and therefore pose a serious risk to the environment. Each year, about [766 571](#) metric tons of cigarettes make their way to the environment and in 2019 alone, about 4,211,962 cigarette butts were collected in waterways and beaches making them the second most known polluter endangering aquatic life. 'This toxic waste of cigarette butts also ends up on the street, drains, and water systems. It is also not uncommon that it is associated with accidental fires, claiming the lives of the innocent, and inconveniencing wildlife', says Prof Ayo-Yusuf.

The tobacco industry makes large profits from the tobacco process while the environment experiences great losses. Through their greenwashing tactics, tobacco companies often aim to detract the public from the harm the industry inflicts on the environment and environmental health. The industry engages in acts of the so called Corporate social responsibility or argues for self-regulatory measures through activities such as tree planting to make up for the destructive acts contributing to deforestation. They also engage in offering environmental disclosure to position themselves as responsible companies whereas the information they provide does not demonstrate the real picture of the impact of their production.

There is a need to hold the industry accountable for the damage caused to the environment. The governments should adopt the comprehensive policies and effective measures required to fulfil their obligations to the WHO FCTC. The Public should engage in intervention campaigns to take note of the risks posed by tobacco to the environment and heighten efforts towards denouncing these tobacco industry activities. The government should help farmers diversify from tobacco to more sustainable crops for improved livelihood and better socioeconomic development and take note of corporate practices undermining the implementation of sustainable alternatives to tobacco growing.

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For additional information, please contact:

Prof Lekan Ayo-Yusuf (lekan.ayo-yusuf@up.ac.za/lekanay@gmail.com)

Kgomotso Kali (kgomotso.kali@smu.ac.za)