Meeting is first step towards ending Global Fund's ill-advised Heineken partnership, though concerns remain

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The inappropriate partnership between the Global Fund and Heineken was the topic of discussion between Marijke Wijnroks, Interim Executive Director of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, and representatives of IOGT International, the Global Alcohol Policy Alliance, and NCD Alliance last Friday in Geneva. During the meeting the civil society representatives underscored concerns over the partnership expressed in a public letter [1]on 1 February.

Close to 100 organisations endorsing the letter [1], prominent global health and development experts and representatives of Global Fund donor governments Norway and Sweden are resolute that a partnership between the alcohol industry and a global health fund is entirely incompatible with our shared vision of health for all and sustainable development.

Comments made by incoming Executive Director Peter Sands in the days since the meeting however underscore remaining concerns that the Global Fund does not see this partnership with Heineken as incompatible with public health and sustainable development goals.

While partnerships can indeed be positive, Sands' latest comments to The Lancet [2] indicate that he doesn't sufficiently heed the concerns voiced in the health and development sector about partnering with a harmful commodity industry, particularly relating to benefits realised by these businesses, such as implied endorsement and access to high level decision makers.

To date no decision has been taken on whether or not the Global Fund will end its partnership with the Dutch brewer, but civil society remains hopeful that the Fund's board will review and agree to end the partnership

> *"In the meeting we elaborated on a host of key issues the Global Fund had clearly missed in their due diligence and review of partnering with an alcohol company. Therefore, the decision to discontinue the partnership is imperative. We are committed to supporting the Global Fund in both crafting better risk assessment guidelines and in tackling alcohol as major risk factors for people and communities affected by*

TB and HIV/AIDS," explained Kristina Sperkova, International President of IOGT International.

Oystein Bakke, Secretary of the Global Alcohol Policy Alliance, reiterated in the meeting that the partnership was assisting Heineken in building their corporate image and indirectly facilitating increased sales and the subversion of effective alcohol policy in Africa going counter to public health objectives, including Global Funds own focus on HIV/AIDS and TB.

Promoting health and sustainable development is fundamentally in conflict with the alcohol industry's aim of increasing sales of a product which is a recognised risk factor of disease and injury to increase profit margins. The alcohol industry uses these types of partnerships for access to the public health policy making process in order to obstruct and derail high-impact, evidence-based alcohol policies – a familiar strategy from the tobacco industry, which alcohol companies are closely connected with.

The civil society representatives present at the meeting welcomed the frank and constructive nature of the discussions and the Global Fund's openness to review its criteria and due diligence processes for partnerships in light of concerns and evidence raised. The Global Fund also expressed interest in joining a dialogue on commercial determinants and (in-) compatible partnerships among global health and development agencies and international organisations.

"The challenge posed by commercial determinants of health is massive, and the question of what does and does not constitute compatible health partnerships in the SDG era is a critical issue that calls for urgent dialogue among the health and development community. We call on the World Health Organisation and the UN Interagency Task Force on NCDs to convene a high-level dialogue among UN entities with the aim of making concrete recommendations on dealing with the industry interference impeding progress on improving global health," said Katie Dain, Chief Executive Officer of the NCD Alliance.

In advance of the United Nations High-Level Meeting on NCDs later this year, the UN Secretary General's report on prevention and control of NCDs[1] published last week noted concerns around industry interference in policy making, and that while multi-stakeholder partnerships are important to reach the ambition of the Sustainable Development Goals, provisions need to be established to address the commercial determinants of NCDs including to safeguard against industry interference.

Commonalities between the tactics of unhealthy commodity industries, such as the tobacco and alcohol industry, and coherent public health strategies to address commercial determinants of health were among the issues discussed during the World Congress on Tobacco or Health [3] taking place in Cape Town this past week.

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ABOUT

IOGT International [4] is the premier global network combining evidence-based policy solution with community-based interventions to prevent and reduce alcohol harm.

Global Alcohol Policy Alliance [5]is a network of non-governmental organisations and people working in public health agencies who share information on alcohol issues and advocate evidence-based alcohol policies, "free from commercial interests."

The NCD Alliance is a unique civil society network uniting 2,000 civil society organisations in more than 170 countries dedicated to improving non-communicable diseases (NCD) prevention and control worldwide.

[1] UN SG's Report on prevention & control of NCDs: http://bit.ly/UNSGreportNCDsEN [6]

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[1] http://iogt.org/open-letters/joint-open-letter-concern-regarding-global-fund-partnering-heineken/
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