

Prevent an independent PMI from worsening the tobacco pandemic



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In anticipation of the expected announcement on 30 January 2008 of the timing of Philip Morris International's spin-off, public health organizations worldwide say there is heightened urgency for governments to enact comprehensive laws to control Philip Morris and other tobacco companies.

"The unleashing of Philip Morris International from Philip Morris USA poses the risk that Philip Morris International will become even more predatory in pushing its toxic products to young people worldwide," says Anna White, of the U.S.-based corporate accountability group Essential Action, "An independent Philip Morris International, which is likely to be based in Switzerland, will no longer feel constrained by public opinion in its home country and most important market, the United States."

Altria/Philip Morris is the world's biggest multinational tobacco corporation. Eighty percent of its sales are outside of the United States.

The company announced last August its intention to pursue the spin-off. Today, Altria's Board of Directors is expected to finalize the decision and announce the timing of the spin-off, assuming required regulatory approvals.

More than 150 public health organizations in over 70 countries worldwide have endorsed a call on governments to adopt comprehensive tobacco control measures to ensure that the spin-off of Philip Morris International does not worsen the tobacco epidemic. Among other measures, they are urging that governments ratify and strongly implement the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, ban the tobacco industry from lobbying or working on legislation to implement the global treaty, and exclude tobacco products from bilateral and multilateral trade and investment agreements. A list of their demands is available at www.philipmorrisbreakup.org/calltogovs .

"An independent Philip Morris International based outside of the United States will be immune to even the possibility of domestic regulation in the United States or litigation in U.S. courts," said Anna White, "This has been a real threat to Philip Morris International."

The litigation risk to Philip Morris International was recently made apparent in the U.S. government case against the tobacco industry. In that case, U.S. Judge Gladys Kessler ruled that Philip Morris and other tobacco companies must stop using misleading terms like "light," "mild" and "low" (as in "Marlboro Lights"). The tobacco industry has used these terms to deceive smokers into thinking they are using a reduced risk product, when they are not. Judge Kessler ruled that the prohibition on use of these misleading terms extends to Philip Morris International. If an independent PMI had no connection to the United States, the judge would not have been able to issue this order.

"The World Health Organization projects that 10 million people will die annually from tobacco-related disease by 2030, 70 percent in developing countries," says White. "We must work to lessen this toll, not allow an independent Philip Morris to make it worse."

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