

To: Margaret Chan, Director-General, World Health Organization

Dear Dr. Chan:

As an independent group of public health professionals, addiction scientists and NGO representatives, we are writing to express our deep concern with the increased involvement of the alcohol industry in the public health arena. We specifically wish to respond to the recent commitments of the 13 producers of beer, wine, and spirits in relation to the WHO Global Strategy to Reduce the Harmful Use of Alcohol. The commitments, developed with the assistance of International Center for Alcohol Policies (ICAP) and the Global Alcohol Producers Group (GAPG), were signed by many of the world's leading alcohol producers, herein referred to as the signatories. In October, 2012, the signatories to the commitments stated in an open letter to you that they "take seriously the important positive role Member States have identified for producers, distributors, marketers, and sellers of beer, wine, and spirits in enhancing global action on this important issue" (Global Actions on Harmful Drinking, 2012)." The same 13 companies are also the sponsors of Global Actions on Harmful Drinking (global-actions.org), a "consortium of initiatives dedicated to helping reduce the harmful use of alcohol" in support of the WHO Global Strategy to Reduce the Harmful Use of Alcohol. We are very concerned that the signatories have misrepresented the role of the alcohol industry in relation to the Global Strategy, in that the Strategy gave the industry no authority to engage in public health activities on behalf of WHO or the public health community. Based on the record of the global alcohol producers and their social aspect organizations during the past five years, we have major reservations about their stated commitments to reduce underage drinking, strengthen self-regulatory marketing codes, reduce drinking and driving, act responsibly in the area of product innovation, and encourage retailers to reduce harmful drinking.

Our reservations can be summarized as follows:

- 1) The commitments are based on questionable assumptions, as stated in their Preamble.
- 2) The actions proposed in the five commitments are weak, rarely evidence-based and are unlikely to reduce harmful drinking.
- 3) Prior initiatives advanced by the alcohol industry as contributions to the WHO Global Strategy have major limitations from a public health perspective.
- 4) The signatories have misinterpreted their roles and responsibilities with respect to the implementation of the WHO Global Strategy.

We enclose a Statement of Concern that has been endorsed by numerous individuals and organisations worldwide. The statement includes recommendations directed at the World Health Organization, the global alcohol producers, their surrogate organizations and the public health community. In particular, we recommend that the global alcohol producers refrain from further engagement in health-related prevention, treatment, research, and traffic safety activities, as these tend to be ineffective, self-serving and competitive with the activities of the WHO and the public health community. The global producers are encouraged to produce products that contain less alcohol and refrain from product designs that have high abuse potential and appeal primarily to youth and other vulnerable groups. They are also requested to limit their advocacy and lobbying activities to issues that have no implications for public health, to stop political activities designed to reduce or eliminate evidence-based alcohol control policies, and to refrain from lobbying against the implementation of evidence-based alcohol control policies.

The Statement of Concern also includes recommendations that WHO and its Regional Offices: clarify the roles and responsibilities of “economic operators” in the implementation of the WHO Global Strategy; avoid partnerships with the commercial alcohol industry, its “social aspects organizations” and other groups funded by the commercial alcohol industry; implement stronger conflict of interest policies, and take other actions to implement the Global Strategy on Harmful Use of Alcohol.

We look forward to your response to this letter and our Statement of Concern.

Kind regards,

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England and Professor, Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences, Maastricht
University, Netherlands;

Dr. Nazarius Mbona Tumwesigye, Makerere University, School of Public Health,
Kampala, Uganda;

Dr. Gerard Hastings, Founder/ Director of the Institute for Social Marketing and Centre for
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Dr. Ronaldo Laranjeira, Director of the National Institute of Alcohol and Drug Policies,
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