Health organisations call on the UNFCCC for robust conflict of interest management of COP following Coca-Cola’s COP27 sponsorship

Dear Mr Stiell,

We, as health organisations concerned by the threat to human and planetary health posed by the climate crisis, write to voice our objection to Coca-Cola sponsoring the Conference of Parties (COP27) in Sharm El Sheikh. As the UNFCCC Executive Secretary tasked with the unique and vital mandate of supporting the global response to the threat of climate change, we ask you to establish mechanisms to mitigate against and limit the influence of environment- and health-harming industries on COP-related policy making and commitments. All sponsors of UNFCCC events must fully respect human rights, including the right to health and to a healthy environment, and align their operations with the 1.5°C tipping point.

Corporate partnerships and sponsorship of the COP - in this instance with and by the world’s leading plastic polluter and a fueller of disease - implies United Nations (UN) and broader government and public tolerance and endorsement of health-harming practices of such corporations. It puts the transparency and evidence-informed nature of COP27 policy dialogues and negotiations at risk. Providing such a high profile platform for corporate actors to ‘greenwash’ their reputation is incompatible with the aims of climate change negotiations. It contributes to the illusion of their commitment to change while their fossil fuel-intensive industries remain key drivers of the climate crisis and the attendant negative impacts on human and planetary health.

We applaud the UN Climate Change Conferences for bringing global attention to the climate crisis directly affecting health. Not only is Coca-Cola the world’s leading plastic polluter, but its products are of vital concern for public health as the consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages are linked to obesity, poor oral health and noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), including cancer and diabetes. The Company has a very poor track record of achieving its sustainability pledges, is increasing plastic use, and utilising corporate playbook tactics to undermine plastic recycling efforts - all the while spending over $4 billion to promote its products. As the CEO of Coca-Cola recently told investors, in “every previous crisis, military, economic or pandemic, in the last 134 years, the Coke Company has come out stronger”. Let’s not allow climate and increased poor health to be yet more crises Coca-Cola is enabled to exploit.

Discussions around planetary and human health must not take place in siloes. The Lancet Global Syndemic Commission Report calls for a systems approach to address underlying and common drivers of obesity, undernutrition and climate change. Global dietary patterns are shifting towards higher consumption of ultra-processed foods and beverages, contributing to the food system’s global CO2 emissions (20-35%). Undernutrition, obesity, and other dietary risks for NCDs constitute the biggest cause (19%) of ill-health and premature death globally. There is an urgent need for effective action to address the over 12 million annual deaths attributable to unhealthy diets alone.

For decades, corporate power has been exercised by the tobacco, alcohol, ultra-processed foods, and fossil fuel industries to resist, delay and subvert evidence-informed public health policy at all levels. Sophisticated strategies to further corporate interests to the detriment of health and climate change call for much stricter risk assessment...
and action, to ensure that policy processes are developed free from real or perceived conflicts of interest and undue corporate influence. UN agencies, processes, and UN Member States must exercise coherence across all sectors: by setting clear rules of engagement, the Secretariat has the opportunity to veto environment- and health-harming corporate actors from using the COP sessions to promote their own interests and undermine climate action.

To ensure the public interest and evidence-based policy making and commitments prevail in these and future negotiations, we call on you to develop and enforce robust mechanisms to mitigate against corporate capture and limit and manage conflicts of interest and undue influence arising from, for example, the association of companies such as Coca-Cola with COP27. Addressing both the climate crisis and the obesity and undernutrition epidemic is urgent. The UNFCCC has an important contribution to make and we look to you to exercise leadership to ensure healthy COPs now and in the future.

Signed,

ACT Health Promotion Brasil
Action Against Hunger
Africa NCDs Network
Alianza por la Salud Alimentaria, Mexico
ANAQ Foundation
Brazilian Alliance for Healthy and Adequate Food
Cameroon NCD Alliance
Center for Epidemiological Studies in Health and Nutrition, USP
Center for Science in the Public Interest
CLUCOD
Coalition for Americas’ Health
CLAS
Diabetes Fighters’ Trust
EarthMedic and EarthNurse Foundation for Planetary Health
European Public Health Alliance
FIAN Brasil
Freshwater Action Network Mexico
Gatefield
Ghana NCD Alliance
Global Climate and Health Alliance
Global Diet and Activity Research Network
Global Food Research Program
University of North Carolina
Global Health 50/50
Global Health Advocacy Incubator
HEALA
Health and Climate Network
Healthy Caribbean Coalition
Healthy India Alliance
Heart Foundation of Jamaica
HRDAY
IDEC
Institute of Alcohol Studies
International Association of Dental Research
Kamran Abassi, Editor in Chief, The British Medical Journal
Lake Health and Wellbeing
Liverpool Obesity Research Network
MOVENDI International
National Action for Sugar Reduction
National Institute of Public Health Mexico
NCD Alliance
NCD Child
Reconciliation and Development Association
Red PaPaz
SAMRC Centre for Health Economics and Decision Science-PRICELESS SA
SPECTRUM
Swedish Institute for Global Health Transformation SIGHT
Tanzania NCD Alliance
The George Institute for Global Health
The Institute for Social Marketing & Health, University of Stirling
The Interamerican Heart Foundation Argentina (FIC Argentina)
Tobacco Control Research Group and Beacon for 21st Century Public Health
Treatment Action Campaign
Trinidad and Tobago NCD Alliance
UK Working Group on NCDs
VicHealth
Vision for Alternative Development
Vital Strategies
World Against Cancer
World Cancer Research Fund International
World Heart Federation
World Obesity Federation
Zambia Heart and Stroke Foundation