

OPEN LETTER DENOUNCING THE LISTING OF ALCOHOL AND TOBACCO AMONG ESSENTIAL PRODUCTS BY MINISTRY OF INDUSTRIALIZATION, TRADE AND ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT

09th April 2020

The Cabinet Secretary

Ministry of Industrialization, Trade and Enterprise Development

Dear CS Betty Maina,

Currently, Kenya and the rest of the world are joining hands in fighting the COVID-19 Pandemic as declared by the World Health Organization (WHO). This pandemic continues to claim thousands of lives every day and countries are rushing to come up with measures to curb the virus and deaths resulting from the same.

We the members of civil society organizations involved in Tobacco Control, Alcohol Control, Cancer Control, Drugs Control and Health Promotion, are pleased that the Kenyan Government is coming up with progressive measures to ensure the COVID-19 curve is flattened and the situation is manageable. We support the government's position of restricting movement through the curfew and restricting access to certain major counties where the spread of the virus is reported to be on the rise. We are also aware that these measures gave special consideration to essential products and services.

We are however, saddened that the Ministry of Industrialization, Trade and Enterprise Development has chosen to enlist alcohol and tobacco as part of essential products **(as reported in one of the local dailies dated April 08, 2020)**. We believe that this move will not only make the Ministry of Health and the government's efforts counterproductive in the fight against COVID-19 but also subject Kenyans to unnecessary yet preventable deaths.

The World Health Organization and other global health experts have authoritatively cited that smoking increases the risk of COVID-19 death. Numerous research have also indicated that people with pre-existing conditions such as Cancers, Diabetes, among others non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are highly susceptible to viral attacks such as the COVID-19. Incidentally, numerous studies also listed tobacco and alcohol use as significant risk factors for these conditions. According to WHO, tobacco use is responsible for over 8 million deaths globally every year while alcohol on the other hand contributes to over 3 million deaths annually. Therefore, besides the pandemic, we see these products as death-traps whose consumption will continue to strain the health system and increase the health burden in Kenya. To this, we should and MUST be cautious not to replace one pandemic with another. **The government should also remain wary of**

commercial and vested interests of these industries even as it's collaborating in trying to find solutions to the COVID 19 pandemic.

We the undersigned believe that your ministry is well intentioned in supporting the fight against COVID-19 and are therefore, urging you to kindly withdraw the listing of these deadly commodities as part of essential products.

We look forward to a positive response from your Ministry.

Cc: Hon. Mutahi Kagwe, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Chairman, National Emergency Response Committee.

Signatories:



Kenya Tobacco Control Alliance



International Institute for Legislative Affairs



TOWARDS A HEALTHY, INFORMED & PRODUCTIVE SOCIETY



Den of Hope Youth Group



alliance (K)
alliance (K)



National Taxpayers Association
pesa zetu, haki yetu

