

Contaminating clean air discussions: health group call to ban fossil fuel industries from attending international climate negotiations

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Tuesday 11 December 2018, Geneva, Switzerland.- The NCD Alliance is leading a call to reject the dominant presence of representatives from fossil fuel industries at the ongoing COP 24 climate conference in Katowice, Poland and protect global health. This presence is exemplified by the promotion of fossil fuel priorities, including by the host government, which jeopardise the health of people and the planet.

Air pollution, primarily caused by burning of fossil fuels, kills 7 million people every year worldwide – in the same range as deaths due to tobacco use - as well as contributing to dangerous climate breakdown. The World Health Organization and the United Nations now recognise air pollution as a leading risk factor for noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), including lung cancer, heart disease, stroke, and chronic respiratory conditions. According to the 2018 report of the Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change, coal pollution alone is responsible for 460,000 premature deaths every year (1). The annual death toll of coal pollution is estimated to be six times higher than the number of people employed by the coal mining industry in the USA (2). Evidence also shows that fracking impacts health of infants born to mothers living within 3 km of a well site during pregnancy, with 25% increased risk of low birth weight for infants born to mothers living within 1 km (3).

Despite clean air being fundamental to the right to health, – the governments of the United States and Saudi Arabia both this week hosted events which promoted the use of coal, oil and gas, with one US government representative announcing that “We strongly believe that no country should have to sacrifice economic prosperity or economic security in pursuit of environmental sustainability (4).” And yet the true costs of fossil fuels far outweigh short term economic gain - meeting the targets of the Paris climate agreement would save over one million lives each year from air pollution alone by 2050, while the value of the health gains would be more than double the cost of action to achieve it (5).

In order for negotiators to be able to achieve long overdue progress to protect global health, fossil fuel industries and their representatives should be banned from future climate change negotiations. There is a valuable precedent set by the UN Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), under which signatory governments must exclude the tobacco industry from negotiations and policy-making in relation to health and tobacco control. The FCTC was adopted in recognition and response to the tobacco industry’s well documented track record in influencing the outcomes of national and international policies and negotiations. The fossil fuel industries have a similar track record

of manipulating science, funding political campaigns, denying evidence, and weakening or delaying policy responses, and should similarly be prohibited from sharing fora with governments whose primary responsibility is to negotiate global political agreements to protect human and planetary health.

Nina Renshaw, Policy and Advocacy Director of the NCD Alliance, said “Vested interest of fossil fuel industries still continuously undermine the negotiation of international agreements urgently needed to prevent further humanitarian catastrophes caused by the changing climate. Human rights must be protected at all costs – it’s long past time to kick these deadly vested interests out of negotiations. Given that the death toll of air pollution is similar to that of the tobacco industry, fossil fuels’ lobbyists must be persona non grata with governments and in international negotiations.”

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2 https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2017/03/31/8-surprisingly-small-industries-that-employ-more-people-than-coal/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.4d939481f6a7 [4]

3 <http://advances.sciencemag.org/content/3/12/e1603021> [5]

4 <https://www.facebook.com/ZayedHEFT/videos/263475624334993?sfns=1> [6] (at 4:00 mins)

5 <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/276405/9789241514972-eng.pdf?ua=1> [7]

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[1] <https://old.ncdalliance.org/sites/default/files/NCD%20civil%20society%20statement%20on%20Fossil%20Fuels%20interests%20at%20COP24.pdf>

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[4] https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2017/03/31/8-surprisingly-small-industries-that-employ-more-people-than-coal/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.4d939481f6a7

[5] <http://advances.sciencemag.org/content/3/12/e1603021>

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