

International Tobacco Accountability Bulletin

News, Updates and Analyses of Issues Related to International Tobacco

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Selling Tobacco and the USA

U.S. Imagery in Tobacco Advertising Worldwide

Red, white, and blue color schemes; stars and stripes; English words; white people; and American slogans are some of the many ways that cigarette companies seek to capitalize on the “American Dream” and perpetuate the myth that all Americans smoke.

The Power of Names. In Chad, Philip Morris sells “Dallas,” namesake of the Texan city and the American television show. There is “Kansas” in Indonesia, “American Legend” in Albania (complete with an eagle and the stars and stripes), and “Houston” in Senegal (with the tagline USAAuthentic). Philip Morris also sells “Congress,” “Red & White,” and “Colorado” abroad.

An Invitation to the U.S. In Argentina, Winston sponsors chances to win a trip to the U.S. In Senegal, Philip Morris’s L & M brand has advertised trips to New York, Chicago, and San Francisco, complete with their universally recognized skylines in the background. Philip Morris also hosts its Marlboro Adventure Team adventure near Moab, Utah. Images of the rough desert terrain are used in television and billboard advertising worldwide, which the company claims attracts over one million applicants each year.

Universal Symbol of Freedom. New York’s Statue of Liberty is a longtime beacon of hope and freedom for immigrants from around the world. In Budapest, Hungary, Pall Mall hung a large image of the American statue at the entrance of its “New York Party Arena.” And the brand “Nelson” was marketed in Senegal during the time Nelson Mandela was still in captivity. The logo? A Statue of Liberty.

A Powerful and Profitable Marketing Ploy

A recent study in Thailand by researchers at Penn State University found a correlation between smoking behavior and attraction to the U.S. and exposure to U.S. movies. Thai teenagers most exposed to U.S. movies and culture were more likely to smoke Marlboro, the study found. The researchers conclude that the “the pattern is suggestive of emulation of the U.S. as a motivating factor in moving Thai teenagers to smoke.”

If tobacco companies are genuine in their pledge to eliminate ads that are aimed to or appeal to youth around the world, their use and abuse of the U.S. flag, icons, place names and vistas must come to an end.

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