

To: Hon. Mr. Anthony Lake

UNICEF House  
3 United Nations Plaza New  
York, NY 10017  
USA

**Open Letter To UNICEF  
Calling Foul On UNICEF And David Beckham**

**29.09.15**

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**Dear Hon. Mr. Lake,**

I trust my letter finds you well.

These are surely exciting times at the United Nations and around the world, as we all celebrate the adoption of the new Sustainable Development Goals.

A lot is at stake for the rights and well being of the world's children. And we in IOGT International deeply appreciate UNICEF's work in ensuring that the rights and the well-being of children are well taken care of within the new 2030 Agenda.

Mr. Lake, I am addressing you today, on behalf of the members of IOGT International – 122 civil society organizations from 54 countries around the world – in reaction to the UNICEF event from September 24 at the United Nations in New York together with Mr. David Beckham.

In IOGT International, together with our Member Organizations, we run almost 21.000 Junior Groups around the world, every year in order to protect, support and empower children from all backgrounds to live up to their fullest potential.

**It is in this context I address you today, to ask for a meeting with you in order to take the discussion about issues outlined in my letter one step further.**

I am deeply worried and troubled by UNICEF's collaboration with Mr. David Beckham – concerning both the collaboration as such and the most recent UNICEF event that featured Mr. Beckham, at the UN, when UNICEF and Mr.

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Beckham unveiled a digital installation to help bring voices of youth to the UN General Assembly.

We surely honor and appreciate UNICEF's intention of giving children around the world a voice and allowing them to highlight their concerns, right in the heart of the United Nations.

**However, with all due respect, we think that the collaboration with Mr. Beckham is ill advised and out of place.**

We are deeply concerned about the conflict of interest that Mr. Beckham obviously has. Mr. Beckham is both a UNICEF Good Will Ambassador and at the same time chose to sign a lucrative endorsement deal with Diageo, the world's biggest producer of hard alcohol.

**Glamorizing alcohol and promoting alcohol consumption while being a Good Will Ambassador for the Rights of the Child are mutually exclusive.**

Vast amount of evidence tells the story clearly: Diageo has amassed a track record of targeting children and young people with their alcohol marketing. Furthermore, Diageo has amassed a track record of unethical conduct in other aspects of its business practices (please see the annexes to this letter).

Independent evidence, compiled by the world's most esteemed researchers clearly shows that alcohol harm is directly related to alcohol marketing.

Alcohol harm causes serious Child Rights abuses of different types – concerning children and youth who are pressured to take up alcohol consumption and who are enticed to consume in hazardous patterns; concerning the negative impact on parents and families; concerning the negative impact on communities and public space; concerning the negative impact on society at

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large, including public health and economic prosperity.

- More than 10% of U.S. children live with a parent with alcohol problems, according to a 2012 study.
- In the U.S., for instance, more than half of all confirmed abuse reports and 75% of child deaths involve the use of alcohol or other drugs by parents.
- In the EU, for example, there are at least 9 million children and young people growing up with parents who have alcohol use disorder.
- In Australia, over a million children (22% of all Australian children) are affected negatively by alcohol use of others (2008). 142,582 children were substantially affected (2008), and more than 10,000 Australian children are in the child protection system because of a adult's alcohol use (2006-07).
- In Japan, up to 14% of parents abusing their children have alcohol use disorders.
- In low- and middle-income countries children often end up on the streets when alcohol ravages in their homes and families.

Alcohol harm is a tremendous burden on the young people of the world.

- Alcohol consumption causes death and disability early in life – relative to other health hazards. In the age group 20 to 39 years of age about 25% of the total deaths are alcohol-attributable.
- Up to 80% of gender-based violence can be alcohol-related.

Mr. Beckham is a global icon that has wide appeal among children worldwide. I'm sure you in UNICEF know that, rely on that and seek to harness that for UNICEF's noble goals. But so does the alcohol industry – for promoting their harmful products that evidently contribute to burdening children and youth.

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We hold that children have a right to grow up free from alcohol and other drugs. We believe that being exposed to alcohol marketing is a violation of that right. We advocate for the Best Interest principle enshrined in the CRC and thus come to the conclusion that evidence-based alcohol policy measures help to protect and promote the rights and well being of children around the world.

**Diageo has opposing interests. For Diageo, children are not rights-holders but future bottle holders, frequent customers and loyal brand affiliates.**

**That is why we are calling foul on the UNICEF collaboration with Mr. Beckham.**

In this context, I'm deeply worried about the fact that Mr. Beckham was chosen to present the "voices of youth" – when one of his business partners continues to lobby aggressively against the Best Interest of the Child, against the well-being and protection of the most vulnerable.

Being mindful about the evidence of how big a burden alcohol puts on the world's children, and being acutely aware of the active role Diageo and its allies are playing in opposing any measure that would substantially reduce that burden, I cannot come to any other conclusion than this:

**Mr. Beckham has, unfortunately, no credibility and no legitimacy as UNICEF Good Will Ambassador in general and as presenter of "the voices of youth" at the United Nations in particular.**

On behalf of the members of IOGT International, I encourage you and UNICEF to hold your Good Will Ambassadors to higher standards.

**We are convinced that the cause of child rights deserves champions that are free from conflict of interest and that do not endorse unethical companies and harmful products.**

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Open Letter  
Kristina Sperkova  
International President

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We therefore call on UNICEF to end the collaboration with Mr. Beckham as "Good Will Ambassador".

And finally, we urge UNICEF to take a stronger and more robust stance on addressing the global epidemic of alcohol harm burdening children, their rights and well-being.

Mr. Lake, in this context, I am looking forward to continuing the dialogue with you and UNICEF, to present more evidence in person and to share with you the stories of children from around the world, affected by alcohol harm.

I believe that there is great potential in together addressing the alcohol burden on children around the world. Together, I'm sure, we can move mountains and give childhood a chance – for all children.

Yours sincerely,



**Kristina Sperkova**  
International President IOGT International,

Washington D.C.,

September 29, 2015

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## Annex I

### Diageo's Business Practices - Evidence

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A simple google search with the key words "Diageo tax evasion" gives the following results:

"Diageo To Settle Korean Tax Evasion Dispute" (South Korea, from January 2015)

"The tax gap: How Diageo plc put Johnnie Walker into a..." (United Kingdom, from February 2009)

"DRI slaps tax evasion charge on Diageo - The Times of India" (India, from May 2011)

Three examples from among the top Google-search results show a track record of Diageo's unethical business practices around the world.

Doubts must be raised why Mr. Beckham chose to enter a lucrative partnership with a company that engages in this type of business practice. Doubts must further be raised, as evidence of other business practices piles up.

Diageo has repeatedly come under criticism by child's rights and public health experts. Diageo targets children and youth with alcohol marketing in social media channels such as [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#). Diageo also uses "social responsibility campaigns" to promote ill-conceived and misogynist images of young women.

Diageo works aggressively to target children and youth in low- and middle-income countries. Please refer to the attached images.

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## Annex II

### Diageo's Marketing Practices Targeting Children, Youth - Examples

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#### 1) "Get Booked", September 2015, Nairobi, Kenya

Alcohol consumption associated with sports, glamour

Alcohol competition for a chance to win tickets to a football match in the UK



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**2) Guinness "Made of more", September 2015, Nairobi, Kenya**

Giant billboard covering 12 floors of Nairobi skyscraper  
Dominating public space, public perception

Note: Situated right next to a nursery.



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### 3) Serengeti Beer, June 2015, Arusha, Tanzania

Slogan: "You can't appreciate chicks (double meaning referring either to food or girls) without Serengeti Premium"

Note: Placed right outside a primary school, in the direct vicinity of another primary school a few hundred meters away.

