



A **civil** voice for tobacco control.

Twenty years of tobacco legislation in the Maldives have advanced faster than enforcement, monitoring or independent oversight. In July 2026 a halved cigarette duty reversed one of the most important gains. This statement sets out the evidence, and why BREATHE was founded as an independent civil-society voice for tobacco and nicotine control.

[Civil society](#)[FCTC Article 5.3](#)[Founding statement](#)

2026 · Malé, Maldives

SUMMARY

Strong laws. Weak follow-through. No one holding the line.

The Maldives has legislated faster and further on tobacco than almost any country: a generational ban, a full e-cigarette ban, advertising prohibited outright. But the same period has seen adult smoking stay flat, an illicit market overtake the legal one, and — in July 2026 — Parliament unanimously reverse the tax increase that underpinned the whole reform.

No organisation in the Maldives was independently responsible for watching that line. BREATHE was founded to be that organisation: independent of government and of the tobacco industry, and dedicated to tobacco and nicotine control alone.

1st Country in the world to legislate a generational tobacco-free cohort (Nov 2025)	8th Rank of 100 countries in the 2025 Global Tobacco Industry Interference Index (score 39)	20_{mo} Time between the 2024 duty increase and its unanimous reversal in July 2026
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WHY NOW

- 1 Legislation has outrun implementation.** Flat adult prevalence and a resurgent illicit market show that law alone has not changed behaviour.
- 2 No independent institution holds the line.** The National Tobacco Control Board is a government body; the country's health NGOs work across many causes, not tobacco specifically.
- 3 Government has invited a civil-society partner.** The announced national cessation programme is to be funded "through civil society organisations."
- 4 The window is open now, not indefinitely.** Two decades of advocacy and this policy juncture will not coincide again soon.

1 · BACKGROUND

Sixteen years of legislation, then one fast final push

The Tobacco Control Act of 2010 laid the framework. Almost nothing changed at pace until 2024–2025, when three amendments arrived within a year: minimum age raised to 21, e-cigarettes banned outright, and — in May 2025 — the world's first generational tobacco ban. Fourteen months later, Parliament reversed course on price, the one lever every WHO review calls the most effective.

- 2010**
Tobacco Control Act: first framework, smoke-free places, advertising ban.
- Nov 2024**
Minimum age raised to 21. Cigarette import duty doubled to MVR 8 per stick.
- Dec 2024**
Full ban on e-cigarettes and vaping devices; police given seizure powers.
- May 2025**
Generational ban ratified: no sale to anyone born on or after 1 Jan 2007.
- Nov 2025**
Generational ban in force. Duty-free tobacco allowances tightened.
- Jul 2026**
Duty halved to MVR 4 per stick; ad valorem rate cut from 50% to 30%.

What has worked

- Smoke-free places and an outright advertising ban remain in force, largely uncontested.
- The e-cigarette ban has been enforced with real teeth: seizure powers and high fines.
- The generational ban earned WHO recognition and international endorsement.
- Two major amendments passed within 13 months, proof the Majlis can move fast on tobacco.

Legal cigarette imports · million sticks per year



Adult smoking did not fall by anything close to 77% over the same period. The missing volume is best explained by a shift to untaxed, unregulated supply. Source: Maldives Customs Service, reported 2021–2026.

2 · ANALYSIS

Why legislation alone has not been enough

Consumption did not disappear. It moved to a channel no one is watching, taxing or measuring.

2.1 Enforcement has not kept pace with the law

Roughly four in ten Maldivian men still smoke daily, a figure two decades of legislation has not meaningfully moved. Customs and market surveillance, spread across nearly 200 inhabited islands, could not contain the illicit trade even as legal imports fell by three quarters. Consumption moved channels; it did not fall.

2.2 A strong score, now under pressure

The Maldives improved from 49 to 39 in the Global Tobacco Industry Interference Index, ranking joint 8th of 100 countries in 2025. That assessment closed in March 2025, before a major tobacco tax decision was taken on unpublished evidence. No Maldivian body monitors Article 5.3 full-time, keeps a public register of industry contacts, or tests official revenue and smuggling claims independently — exactly the evidence gap that shaped the July 2026 debate.

2.3 No standing institution is responsible for holding the line

The National Tobacco Control Board sits inside government and cannot independently monitor the state's own decisions. The country's health NGOs work across many causes, and none is dedicated to tobacco control or resourced to monitor it full-time. The Ministry of Health is subject to the same fiscal and political pressure the evidence above describes. When the next reversal is proposed, the same gap will be there to meet it.

What the government got right

Removing import duty on nicotine replacement therapy makes quitting cheaper, and the national cessation campaign launched in mid-2026 plans to work through civil society. Both deserve support and a credible partner to build on them.

3 · THE CIVIL-SOCIETY GAP

No one is watching the line full-time

Every existing body touching tobacco control in the Maldives has a mandate that stops short of independent, full-time oversight.

Body	Mandate	Limitation
National Tobacco Control Board	Government coordinating body	Not independent Cannot monitor the state's own decisions
Health NGOs, generally	Broad health advocacy across many causes	Not dedicated Tobacco is one of many priorities, not a core mandate
Ministry of Health	Policy design and implementation	Subject to pressure Same fiscal and political cycle as the evidence shows
BREATHE Founded 2026	Article 53 monitoring, research, policy papers	Independent and dedicated Tobacco and nicotine control is its only mandate

"The government will launch a national cessation initiative through civil society organisations, with funding and incentives linked to their success."

— President Dr Mohamed Muizzu, June 2026. BREATHE aims to be a credible, independent partner for that programme.

4 · BREATHE

An independent body to hold the line

Mission. To protect and advance evidence-based tobacco control in the Maldives through independent research, policy advocacy and public engagement, insulated from the political and fiscal cycles that have reversed past gains.

1 Research & Monitoring

Article 5.3 industry-interference tracking, independent economic modelling, prevalence and enforcement data.

FIRST OUTPUT

Industry Watch Report No. 01, the Maldives' first independent industry-interference report

2 Policy Advocacy

Position papers for the Majlis and ministries; a standing voice when tax, trade or licensing rules are debated.

FIRST OUTPUT

Policy Brief No. 01, *Price is policy*, on the July 2026 duty reversal

3 Public Engagement

Cessation-programme partnership, coalition-building, and public communication grounded in evidence.

FIRST OUTPUT

Proposal to government as a cessation-programme delivery partner

5 · HOW WE WORK

Four principles behind every paper

Evidence first

We draw on legislation, official data, parliamentary records and international evidence reviews. Figures from news or debate are labelled as indicative and updated when official data are published.

Independent

BREATHE accepts no funding from the tobacco or nicotine industry or its affiliates, and applies Article 5.3 to its own conduct as well as to government's.

Constructive

We set out options and practical proposals, and we say clearly when government gets things right.

Open

Every publication is free to read, download and cite. Our methods and sources are published alongside our findings.

WORK WITH US

Tobacco control is stronger with more voices behind it.

BREATHE welcomes collaboration with researchers, health professionals, educators, civil-society organisations, young people and government. Get in touch through the contact page of our website.

METHOD

This statement draws on published legislation, parliamentary and trade-press reporting, the Global Tobacco Industry Interference Index, and Maldives Customs Service data as reported 2021–2026. Figures from news and parliamentary reporting are treated as indicative pending official publication.

REFERENCES

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3. The Standard Maldives; Maldives Independent (2026). Reporting on Parliament's duty-reduction bill, revenue and smuggling figures.
4. Global Center for Good Governance in Tobacco Control (2025). Global Tobacco Industry Interference Index 2025: Maldives country profile. globaltobaccoindex.org/country/MV
5. WHO. Global Youth Tobacco Survey, Maldives 2019 fact sheet.
6. WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, Article 5.3.

HOW TO CITE

BREATHE (2026). *A civil voice for tobacco control*. Founding Statement. Malé: BREATHE.



BREATHE is an independent Maldivian civil-society organisation for tobacco and nicotine control. We produce research and policy papers, monitor tobacco industry interference under FCTC Article 5.3, and work with government, Parliament and communities to protect the gains of the past two decades.

BREATHE accepts no funding from the tobacco or nicotine industry or its affiliates.