

[NGO joint statement submitted by Neville Rigby of the IOTF, the delegate representing the IDF and IUNS]

Joint statement to the 113th meeting of the Executive Board of the World Health Organization, Geneva. Item 3.7 Integrated Prevention of Non-Communicable Diseases

Mr Chairman, honourable members of the Executive Board, Director-General, Regional Directors, ladies and gentlemen,

I represent the International Obesity Task Force, a scientific body concerned to halt the rising epidemic of obesity and I have the honour of making this statement on behalf of the the International Association for the Study of Obesity, the International Diabetes Federation, the International Union of Nutritional Sciences, the International Pediatric Association with the endorsement of the World Heart Federation, whose statement you have just heard.

As NGOs collaborating closely with the WHO in the prevention of chronic non-communicable diseases, we have an important stake in this discussion. Our members are drawn from the scientific, medical and health professions but also from lay members and we therefore represent civil society interests too. We wish to express our clear commitment to the proposals before you and take this opportunity to pay tribute to all those present and former WHO staff who have worked with dedication on this difficult task.

The need for this strategy was never more urgent. A major global epidemic of cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, overweight and obesity, affects both the developing and developed world.

It is determined particularly by social factors promoting inappropriate diet and inactivity.

Children do not make a personal choice over the environment they grow up in. Children are increasingly vulnerable to the inadequacies of diet and activity now resulting in high levels of obesity, the unprecedented development of type 2 diabetes and exposure to cardiovascular risks from an early age. In the United States nearly one in three obese adolescents suffers a combination of these risks, known as the metabolic syndrome.

The IOTF is submitting to the Director General and his advisers a major report on of the global challenge of childhood obesity, prepared by an IOTF working group chaired by Professor Ricardo Uauy, who is present here today. Prof Uauy, from Chile, also chaired the expert group which prepared the WHO Report on Diet, Nutrition and the Prevention of Chronic Diseases, the WHO 916 report.

However this is not the only document on which the global strategy is based. It is reinforced by a succession of major documents which provide evidence for action that cannot be ignored.

The WHO 797 report, *Diet, Nutrition and the Prevention of Chronic Diseases*, which informed the International Conference on Nutrition in 1992 and its World Declaration and Plan of Action for Nutrition, was, I understand, endorsed by a resolution of World Health Assembly in 1993.

The IOTF helped in the development of the WHO 894 report, *Obesity: Preventing and Managing the Global Epidemic*, which highlighted that many countries are

struggling with childhood undernutrition whilst facing a double burden of diet-induced non-communicable diseases.

The WHO International Agency for Research in Cancer published its *Handbook for Weight Control and Physical Activity*, providing further exhaustive analyses of diet, activity and weight-related diseases.

A number of our eminent leading scientific members including the President and vice presidents of the IUNS, along with several IOTF experts including many from developing countries, were part of the team which worked on the 916 report.

This provided a rigorous assessment of the best available evidence, peer reviewed and subject to a more exhaustive public consultation process than any previous scientific study. Its careful scientific judgements were reached impartially.

The evidence supporting the role of excessive consumption of saturated fats, sugars and salt in the development of non-communicable diseases is robust and indisputable. The benefits of promoting a healthier diet – particularly increasing the consumption of fruit and vegetables – in order to reduce or prevent chronic diseases is acknowledged in WHO's worldwide promotion of the 5-a-day goal.

This strategy demands the broad support of all member states, and agencies, but it must also address other important determinants of health affected by trade, agriculture and economic environments. The Codex Alimentarius Commission should be encouraged to play an important role in these areas.

The food and drink industry has an important role too. It has far greater means at its disposal to provide the solutions to improving dietary health. It must be encouraged to rise to this challenge, seizing the significant new opportunities to optimise the nutritional quality of diets. It must honour those public commitments its leaders are already making to be part of the solution and to contribute to improving dietary health.

We would welcome a stronger emphasis on a role for international NGOs providing expertise and guidance in the further development of the strategy and in supporting its long-term implementation. There is a clear role for responsible bodies and research organisations to support the international scientific surveillance mechanisms necessary to ensure the strategy is sustained in an effective manner.

Members of the Board are challenged to support the first significant opportunity to address the nutritional challenges of the 21st century in a coherent manner and to shape a new vision of public health focused on the *prevention* of the chronic diseases.

This has the potential to transform the health of billions of the world's citizens. Therefore we urge you to give this resolution your wholehearted support and commendation to the next World Health Assembly. We now look to all the WHO member states to provide strong leadership to take this forward.

Signed

Professor Claude BOUCHARD, President, International Association for the Study of Obesity

Professor Pierre LEFEBVRE, President, International Diabetes Federation
Professor Philip POOLE-WILSON, President, World Heart Federation
Professor Mark WAHLQVIST, President, International Union of Nutritional Sciences
Professor Ricardo UAUY, President-elect, International Union of Nutritional Sciences
Professor Philip JAMES, Vice President, International Union of Nutritional Sciences, and chairman of the International Obesity Task Force (IOTF)
Professor Jane Green SCHALLER, President, International Pediatric Association (IPA)

January 26 2004