

Statement to the 57th meeting of the World Health Assembly on Item 12.6 - The Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health

Mr Chairman, honourable members of the World Health Assembly, Director-General, Regional Directors, ladies and gentlemen.

The following is a joint statement delivered by the International Obesity TaskForce on behalf of the International Association for the Study of Obesity, the International Diabetes Federation and the International Pediatric Association, with the support of two other significant organizations, the International Union of Nutritional Sciences and the World Heart Federation which wish to make separate complementary statements.

Collectively these associations represent the widest range of scientific and medical knowledge on non-communicable disease, public health and nutritional expertise combined with concerned lay members from all parts of the world. Our members have already expressed support for a **strong** global strategy on diet, physical activity and health. A strong strategy is essential in order to address the mounting epidemics of obesity, diabetes and heart disease. A strong strategy is essential to ensure a more effective global culture of care and responsibility for the nutritional health of all children.

A growing proportion of the population is affected by overweight and obesity, which are powerful determinants of type 2 diabetes and other chronic non-communicable diseases. The International Obesity TaskForce's report to WHO on childhood obesity^{1[1]} identifies that 155 million schoolchildren face sustained overweight problems before they reach adulthood. More than one quarter of them are obese.

One in three children born today in the United States is expected to develop type 2 diabetes. A disease once associated exclusively with old age is now increasingly blighting the lives of children. We are witnessing a public health tragedy unfolding as many of the rest of the world's children are following a similar road map to those in the USA.

The forces driving this rapid transformation are not hidden. The US Department of Agriculture has concluded: "A big jump in average calorie intake between 1985 and 2000 without a corresponding increase in the level of physical activity (calorie expenditure) is the prime factor behind America's soaring rates of obesity and type 2 diabetes." Fats and added sugars accounted for half the 300 calorie surplus. Fruits and vegetables, the one food category where consumption is recommended to be increased, accounted for only 8 per cent.

This is an issue that no country can afford to ignore. The Food and Agriculture Organization's Agricultural Outlook forecasts a similar 300 calorie jump in daily per capita intake across developing and transition countries by 2030.

"Obesity and diabetes" have been adopted as the theme for World Diabetes Day on November 14 2004. A new report on this twin threat to world health has been prepared by the IDF and IASO and will be published next week. This report, entitled **Time To Act**, recommends that strong measures to improve diet and

^[1] IOTF Childhood Obesity Working Group: Obesity in children and young people: A crisis in public health. Obesity Reviews 2004; 5 (Suppl 1): 4-85.

activity to combat these epidemics are needed including restrictions on marketing targeted at vulnerable children, and careful consideration of the way public expenditure is used in order to switch the emphasis away from the dominance of fats and added sugars in the diet, towards greater consumption of fruit and vegetables. The benefits of doing so are huge, as the World Bank's economists have noted, offering a major boost to the economies of developing countries.

The global strategy is needed to encourage and enable Member States to begin to address the critical diet and physical activity challenges for a new generation and to provide the signposts on the road to better diet, physical activity and health for all. We urge Member States not to hesitate in taking all the necessary steps to achieve his essential goal.

IUNS Statement Shown Below

[NGO statement submitted by Professor WPT James, head of the delegation of the International Union of Nutritional Sciences (IUNS)]

Statement to the 57th meeting of the World Health Assembly of the World Health Organization, Geneva, Thursday 20 May 2004

Item 12.6. Global strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health

Mr Chairman, honourable members of the World Health Assembly, Director-General, Regional Directors, ladies and gentlemen.

I represent the International Union of Nutritional Sciences. IUNS which is the official scientific body representing the Academies of Medicine and Royal Societies of the world through their official relationship with ICSU and UNESCO. We have Scientific groups throughout the world working in Agriculture, Medicine, Public Health, and the Social and Behavioural Sciences. This statement is endorsed by the ???

Most countries do not yet understand that the biggest causes of death and disability now affecting babies, children, young adults and the elderly are nutritional in origin. This was shown in the recent World Health Reports to which many of our members have contributed. Malnutrition with deficiency diseases still affect billions of children and adults but now in the economically deprived world Ministries of Health are facing a huge double burden of disease. Not only do we see millions of low birth weight babies being born and childhood malnutrition killing millions every year but we now find scarce resources being diverted to meet the treatment needs of adults with diabetes, obesity, hypertension, heart disease, strokes and cancer. This epidemic affects the poor more than the rich and countries with malnourished mothers and babies are producing a generation which is even more sensitive to the development of obesity and all its associated illnesses. Th problem is therefore acute in the most economically deprived countries of the world

New evidence shows that no country - even in North America or Europe - can afford the escalating epidemics of cardiovascular disease, diabetes and cancer. Technological fixes and pharmaceutical innovation cannot meet the needs of the majority of the population so prevention is the only strategy that any country can afford. This strategy is essential for the economically deprived world.

The WHO/FAO expert report number 916 on 'Diet, Nutrition and the Prevention of Chronic Diseases' should become the central plank of thinking for Ministries of Health . Since it was produced much new scientific evidence affirms its validity. IUNS therefore supports the proposed global strategy which ideally should be strengthened in keeping with an evidence based approach to policy making . We look forward to its adoption at this meeting of the World Health Assembly.

Ministers should note that vested interests have led to the current confusion relating to the economic implications of the global strategy. WHO needs a full analysis but already it is clear that the global strategy is essential for poor countries and that agricultural economics will improve not deteriorate as a result of implementing this strategy.

Finally we emphasize the importance of science and evidence in determining public policies. The private sector have an invaluable role to play in the implementation phase of this strategy but all vested interests should not be allowed to distort the development of appropriate policies. This has clearly been understood in issues of food safety and food toxicology and these principles should now be applied to the nutritional issues of food. Without this clear separation of public and private interests in the making of this global strategy the health of the world is likely to deteriorate instead of improving.

Thank you Mr. Chairman