

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO SPEAK

Agenda Item 3.7 Diet, Physical Activity and Health Statement by Patti Rundall on behalf of Consumers International

Mr Chair, honourable members of the Executive Board, Director General. On behalf of Consumers International, the International Baby Food Action Network, and Health Action International, I welcome this opportunity to take the floor on this very important issue.

We wish to express our warm support for this urgently needed strategy which attempts to address the epidemic of non-communicable diseases that we are all now so acutely aware of. There is wide agreement amongst the scientific community about what does constitute a healthy diet, and it is clear that WHO's proposals, which were developed through extensive consultation, are based on sound science. It is only parts of the food industry which question this and try to muddy the water.

We urge government delegates here and the WHO to stand firm against attempts to undermine, sideline or delay this strategy. We note that one of the countries with the highest obesity rates in the world, has called for a policy based in large part on "individual responsibility" - shifting responsibility away from industry. According to the Centre for Science in the Public Interest that policy has been tried in that very country and has failed. Is it right now to export this failed strategy to the rest of the world? Consumers have a right to expect their governments to develop effective policies and where necessary regulation to promote and protect public health.

In order to achieve this it is critically important that WHO takes up the Gambia's suggestion and provides guidelines which protect its integrity and its policy-making process. We have seen a good example of this with the *Framework Convention on Tobacco Control*, where tobacco companies are specifically excluded from policy setting. The *Global Strategy on Infant and Young Child Feeding* also addresses the issue of conflicts of interest by identifying an appropriate role for the food industry. One wonders where the evidence is that involving commercial companies in policy setting is an effective strategy in the protection of health.

We are pleased that the draft Diet Strategy mentions the important role that breastfeeding and appropriate complementary feeding plays in preventing non-communicable diseases throughout the whole life cycle. It is essential that these references are retained and we would urge that they are highlighted in the Report and proposed Resolution (EB113/44).

As international NGO networks working in the NON-profit sector we offer our support to WHO to develop this strategy for the benefit of citizens in both industrialised and non-industrialised countries, and we are pleased that the DG mentioned the importance of this collaboration in his opening address. It would be helpful if the importance of such collaboration was mentioned in the Strategy as it has been since its inception.

Lastly I must mention our concerns about placing too much emphasis on health and nutrition claims as an agent for change. IBFAN and CI have worked for many years on the issue of health claims, at Codex and in other fora, and have shown how health claims can be used to project a healthful image to what otherwise are unhealthy products and are rarely on fresh fruits and vegetables. **Health claims are not appropriate at all for foods for infants and young children.** We need the food industry to reduce salt, fat and sugar levels in many foods, not to hide these ingredients or pretend that they are not a problem. Neither is fortifying

foods made with inherently poor nutritional quality an acceptable way forward. *Coca Cola* fortified with calcium or chocolate flavoured *Cerelac* is not the answer. We must consider issues such as sustainability and the impact of these foods on national and family economies, healthy indigenous and traditional foods, in terms of import, purchasing and health service costs.

Chairman, delegates, we urge you to endorse the Strategy without further delay or weakening. Thank you.

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