



# WHO 57<sup>th</sup> World Health Assembly

## World Heart Federation Statement Provisional agenda item 12.6 The Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health

Janet Voûte, CEO

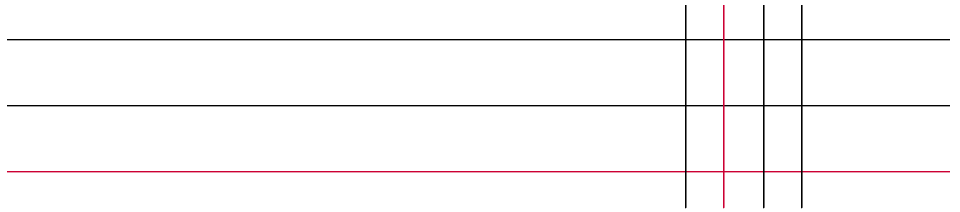
*Mr Chairman, honourable members of the World Health Assembly, Director-General, Regional Directors, ladies and gentlemen: On behalf of the World Heart Federation, I would like to underline the critical importance of adopting the WHO global strategy on diet, physical activity and health, for the health of today's populations and future generations.*

The World Heart Federation is an NGO which brings together all societies of cardiology and heart foundations around the globe. We have 180 member organizations in 100 countries. Our mission is to prevent and control heart disease and stroke with a focus on low and middle-income countries. We have a tremendous challenge before us since cardiovascular disease causes approximately 17 million deaths annually and, as such, is the leading cause of death around the globe.

80% of global cardiovascular disease (CVD)-related deaths and 87% of CVD-related disabilities occur in low and middle-income countries. CVD cuts into the productive workforce in these countries<sup>i</sup>, to a degree not seen in industrialized nations. In South Africa, 41% of the deaths attributed to cardiovascular disease occur between 35 and 64 years old. Direct health care costs for CVD in the developing world will inevitably rise as prevalence rises.

Taking into account the scope of the CVD issue and the costs it represents, it is of particular importance to begin to address the root causes of the problem now. Prevention is the only cost-effective strategy for all countries concerned.

Unhealthy diets and physical inactivity, together with tobacco consumption, are the leading lifestyles causes of major chronic diseases, including cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and certain types of cancer.<sup>ii</sup> Globally, there are more than 1 billion overweight and obese adults in the world, 300 million of whom have a BMI 30 or more and are therefore considered obese. 115 million obese people live in developing countries. Furthermore, unhealthy lifestyles are adopted at an increasingly early age. Thus, approximately 10% of young people aged 5-17 years are overweight, corresponding for the year 2000 to 155 million overweight children including 30-45 million obese worldwide<sup>iii</sup>.



The trend towards unhealthy diets has been documented around the globe. There is an increase in consumption of foods that are energy-dense high in sugar and/or saturated fats and excessively salty. The 2002 World Health Report has estimated that up to 2.7 million lives could potentially be saved each year if fruit and vegetable consumption were sufficiently increased. There has been a remarkable increase in the intake of dietary fats over the past three decades worldwide except in Africa. The daily per capita supply of fat from animal foods has increased in developing countries and in economies in transition.

The WHO Global strategy on diet, physical activity and health has already set the stage for positive inter-actions with industry as well as national chronic disease prevention programmes and activities in the community. Today, the World Heart Federation uses the global strategy as a framework for its activities in the field of physical activity and healthy nutrition. We have developed international collaboration on this issue with other non-governmental organizations and we have joined the dialogue with industry to promote change. The strategy is beginning to work as we speak.

We call upon the World Health Assembly to adopt the global strategy on diet, physical activity and health for the better health of all nations. We ask that public health take priority over any other objective. We believe better health is the most important key to economic development. This strategy is an excellent first step towards a sustained, long-term commitment on the part of international organizations, governments, industry, the medical community and NGOs to work together to curtail the chronic disease epidemic.

Geneva, 19 June 2004

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<sup>i</sup> A Race Against Time. The Challenge of Cardiovascular Disease in Developing Economies. The Center for Global Health and Economic Development, New York, 2004.

<sup>ii</sup> The World Health Report 2002: Reducing risks, promoting healthy life. Geneva, World Health Organization, 2002.

<sup>iii</sup> Steller N. Comment : The global epidemic of childhood obesity : is there a role for the paediatrician ? 2004. The International Association for the Study of Obesity. Obesity review 5 (suppl.1), 1-3.

