



Statement 2

WHO Executive Board 113th Session WHF Statement

Item 3.7 Provisional agenda

Mr Chairman, honourable members of the Executive Board, Director-General, Regional Directors, ladies and gentlemen, the World Heart Federation wishes to take the opportunity to emphasize the importance of the WHO global strategy on diet, physical activity and health. This strategy is fundamental to the creation of a supportive environment in the context of healthy lifestyles linked with nutrition and physical activity.

The World Heart Federation is extremely concerned about the obesity issue worldwide. Unhealthy diets and physical inactivity as well as tobacco consumption are the leading causes of major non-communicable diseases, including cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and certain types of cancer.¹ Globally, there are 1.1 billion overweight and obese adults in the world, 300 million of whom have a BMI 30 or more and are therefore considered as obese. 115 million obese people live in developing countries and suffer from related illnesses such as heart disease, hypertension, non-insulin dependent diabetes and high levels of cholesterol. Furthermore, unhealthy lifestyles are adopted at an increasingly early age. Thus, across the world, approximately 22 million children under the age of five are obese and many more are overweight.

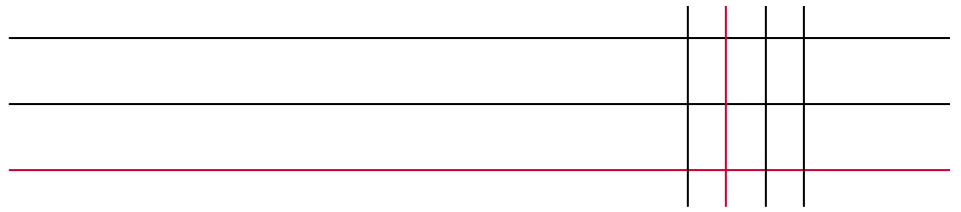
The current obesity epidemic is caused largely by an environment, which encourages unbalanced diets and discourages physical activity. An unhealthy lifestyle in childhood is not a matter of individual responsibility but rather a matter of health protection. Children in particular should be protected from an unhealthy environment.

Rapid changes in diets and in patterns of physical activity are leading to an increased burden of mortality, morbidity and disability in developing countries.

Multilateral collective strategies, including the development of an international strategy and standards, together with supportive government policies, are essential in order to protect and promote public health against the hazards associated with inappropriate nutrition and physical inactivity.

We urge the Executive Board to recommend to the next World Health Assembly the adoption of the global strategy on diet, physical activity and health. This strategy will incite international NGOs to strengthen their collaboration on this issue. It will facilitate implementation of initiatives by the national members of these NGOs.

¹ The World Health Report 2002: Reducing risks, promoting healthy life. Geneva, World Health Organization, 2002.



The World Heart Federation comprises 175 member societies of cardiology and heart foundations in over 100 countries and continental members covering the regions of Asia-Pacific, Europe, Eastern Mediterranean, the Americas and Africa. Through its members, the World Heart Federation will advocate that governments adopt and implement effective policies to fight obesity. These include for example, the development of areas for physical activity; the adaptation of school curricula to increase physical exercise; the adoption of measures to make healthier food more readily available and at a lower price.

There is an urgent need for action on diet, physical activity and health. The adoption of the WHO global strategy must be the first step towards a sustained and long-term commitment on the part of international agencies, governments, industry, NGOs and civil society to work together to address this need.

Geneva, 20 January 2004

