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## **IMPACT OF UNHEALTHY FOOD REQUIRES TOBACCO-STYLE RESPONSE, SAY GLOBAL CONSUMER AND HEALTH EXPERTS**

- Global diet-related deaths continue to rise despite 10 years of WHO strategy
- Governments must take on corporate interests to have any hope of beating obesity crisis
- International alliance calls for globally binding treaty to reverse dangerous trends in eating habits.

Consumers International<sup>i</sup> and World Obesity Federation<sup>ii</sup> today call on the international community to develop a global convention to fight diet-related ill health, similar to the legal framework for tobacco control. Unhealthy diets now rank above tobacco as a global cause of preventable non-communicable diseases (NCDs).

The two international membership bodies will officially launch their *Recommendations towards a Global Convention to protect and promote healthy diets*<sup>iii</sup> at the World Health Assembly in Geneva this week.

The Recommendations call on governments to make a binding commitment to introduce a raft of policy measures designed to help consumers make healthier choices and improve nutrition security for everyone.

Measures include placing stricter controls on food marketing, improving the provision of nutrition information, requiring reformulation of unhealthy food products, raising standards for food provided in public institutions and using economic tools to influence consumption patterns.

Publication of the Recommendations comes on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the WHO *Global Strategy on Diet and Physical Activity and Health*<sup>iv</sup>, which recognised the health impact of unhealthy diet and lifestyle.

Since then however, global deaths attributable to obesity and overweight have risen from 2.6 million in 2005<sup>v</sup> to 3.4 million in 2010<sup>vi</sup>, thus intensifying the pressure on governments to take stronger action tackle the rising epidemic of obesity and consequent chronic disease.

Consumers International Director General, Amanda Long says: “The scale of the impact of unhealthy food on consumer health is comparable to the impact of cigarettes. The food and beverage industry has dragged its feet on meaningful change and governments have felt unable or unwilling to act.

“The only answer remaining for the global community is a framework convention and we urge governments to seriously consider our recommendations for achieving that. If they do not, we risk decades of obstruction from industry and a repeat of the catastrophic global health crisis caused by smoking.”

World Obesity Federation Director of Policy, Dr Tim Lobstein says: “The global prevalence of obesity - defined as a BMI  $\geq 30$  - doubled between 1980 and 2008, to 10% of all men worldwide, and 14% of all women. That’s 205 million men and 297 million women - more than half a billion obese people. In terms of numbers, the United States has led the way, but they are closely followed by China, Brazil, and Mexico.

“These figures show the scale of the problem to be addressed. If obesity was an infectious disease we would have seen billions of dollars being invested in bringing it under control. But because obesity is largely caused by the overconsumption of fatty and sugary foods, we have seen policy-makers unwilling to take on the corporate interests who promote these foods. Governments need to take collective action and a Framework Convention offers them the chance to do this.”

Obesity is a major risk factor for a wide range of non-communicable diseases and, in 2008, 36 million people died from non-communicable diseases, representing 63 per cent of the 57 million global deaths that year. In 2030, such diseases are projected to claim the lives of 52 million people.<sup>vii</sup>

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*Consumers International and World Obesity Federation will be hosting a launch event for the Recommendations at the Geneva Press Club at 6pm on Wednesday 21 May.*

*Speakers will include **Amanda Long**, Director General, Consumers International; Professor **Boyd Swinburn**, Co-chair of the World Obesity, Policy & Prevention; and Professor **Olivier De Schutter**, UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food. The discussion will be chaired by **Corinna Hawkes**, Head of Policy and Public Affairs, World Cancer Research Fund International.*

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<sup>i</sup> Consumers International (CI) is the world federation of consumer groups that, working together with its members, serves as the only independent and authoritative global voice for consumers. With over 250 member organisations in 120 countries, we are building a powerful international movement to help protect and empower consumers everywhere.

Founded in 1960, we are fighting for a fair, safe and sustainable future for all consumers in a global marketplace increasingly dominated by international corporations.

CI is a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee and registered in the UK (company no. 4337865). We are also a registered UK charity (no. 1122155).

<sup>ii</sup> World Obesity Federation is the new name for the International Association for the Study of Obesity (IASO) and International Obesity TaskForce (IOTF). We represent professional members of the scientific, medical and research communities from over 50 regional and national obesity associations. Through this global community we work to alert the world to the growing crisis caused by soaring levels of obesity and to drive global efforts to reduce, prevent and treat obesity.

<sup>iii</sup> <http://consint.info/healthy-diets>

<sup>iv</sup> [http://www.who.int/dietphysicalactivity/strategy/eb11344/strategy\\_english\\_web.pdf](http://www.who.int/dietphysicalactivity/strategy/eb11344/strategy_english_web.pdf)

<sup>v</sup> <http://ncdalliance.org/node/42>

<sup>vi</sup> <http://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMra1203528>

<sup>vii</sup> [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/66/83&Lang=E](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/66/83&Lang=E)