

**Statement WHO/7
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WHO D-G BRUNDTLAND EMPHASIZES IMPORTANCE OF NGO INPUT INTO DIET AND CHRONIC DISEASE STRATEGY

Roundtable meeting launches civil society consultation on WHO Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health

Director-General Dr Gro Harlem Brundtland, MD, today hosted a roundtable meeting between World Health Organization (WHO) and representatives of leading health and consumer non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to discuss ways of working together more effectively to encourage healthier diets and increased physical activity worldwide.

WHO is currently preparing a Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health to address the growing toll of death and disability from chronic diseases, for presentation to the World Health Assembly in May 2004. The NGO consultation, which also includes an all-day discussion tomorrow between NGOs and WHO officials, is an important part of the strategy development process, said Dr Brundtland.

Thanking the NGOs for the strong support shown to WHO since it began developing the Strategy last year in response to Member State concern, Dr Brundtland said that they played a key role in shifting and influencing consumer demand, as well as national and international political priorities.

Cardiovascular disease, cancers, diabetes, respiratory disease, obesity and other noncommunicable conditions now account for 59 per cent of the 56.5 million global deaths annually, and almost half, or 45.9 per cent, of the global burden of disease. The majority of chronic disease problems now occur in developing countries. Unhealthy diet, physical inactivity and tobacco use are among the leading causes.

Dr Brundtland briefed NGOs on WHO interaction with the private sector and on discussions at a Roundtable meeting last week in WHO. And she emphasized that food, in its complexity, was not like tobacco, nor was it similar to infant feeding, other key issues where WHO has worked closely with NGOs.

“Our approach to food is different from that to tobacco,” she said. “Shifting the pattern of diet and physical activity behaviour across the global population demands a more nuanced and multifaceted approach. We intend to pursue a constructive dialogue with all parties to develop a strategy that reflects the interests of all stakeholders on this complex issue.”

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The NGO Roundtable was attended by representatives of about 15 leading NGOs, including International Union of Nutritional Sciences, World Hypertension League, International Union Against Cancer, Trim Fitness Sport for All Association, European Heart Network, British Heart Foundation, International Obesity Task Force, Diabetes Federation, International Baby-Food Action Network, National Heart Forum, International Association of Consumer Foods, World Heart Federation, Stakeholder Forum and Consumers International.

Five WHO Regional Member State consultations on the Strategy have already taken place, with a sixth and final scheduled for June. Consultations are scheduled in June with UN agencies and industry trade associations. WHO will then focus on drafting the strategy, which will be made available for comment by all stakeholders before the end of the year.

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