

Statement by Medicus Mundi International to the 70th session of the World Health Assembly on agenda item 15.5 Report of the Commission on Ending Childhood Obesity: implementation plan

MMI appreciates this opportunity to address agenda item 15.5. Our statement is supported by PHM.

We appreciate efforts by the WHO and MS for the comprehensive draft Implementation Plan of the High-Level Commission on ECHO. It addresses the root causes of childhood obesity and SDH, appropriately situated within the context of larger issues of globalisation, agriculture, and trade. We urge MS to adopt the proposed plan and strengthen the interventions to address the problem of childhood obesity.

The document recognises the fact that current policies related to these sectors have insufficient protections for public health, which have a disproportionate impact on the poor and vulnerable. WHO's suggested interventions such as nutrient profiling, ban on advertisements, sugar tax, facilities for physical activity are appreciated. A sugar tax, however, needs to be accompanied by measures that provide alternative sources of affordable and nutritious foods so that the poor are not punished by the tax. The proceeds from a sugar tax should be ring-fenced and used to subsidize foods that are nutritious.

However, there are several concerns that we would like to bring to the notice of MS on the issue of childhood obesity. It is clear that the Draft Implementation Plan will only be able to achieve its aims and objectives if it is passed and recognised as a binding international treaty. This would ensure that MS have the necessary mandate and enabling political will to ensure the effective implementation of interventions. This would provide a stronger position from which to enact policies and regulations in the face of opposition from commercial interests. In particular, nutrient profiling, food labelling, taxation of sugar-sweetened beverages, and other regulatory strategies need to be given treaty status globally to protect them from corporate challenge under trade agreements.

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