

## **Speech – Food, crucial for public health: International Conference “On the Most Important Reserves to Implement Food Programme in Uzbekistan”**

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Mr President, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to convey my sincere thanks to the Government of Uzbekistan for the kind invitation to address the audience on the occasion of this important and most timely conference on a this crucial topic – food. WHO considers food security, food safety and diet crucial for good health. In achieving good public health it is paramount that the various sectors work together – and the agriculture sector has an important role to play.

Uzbekistan is an important producer of fruits and vegetables, which are essential for a healthy and balanced diet and the prevention of disease, in particular noncommunicable diseases (NCDs).

The negative impact of unhealthy diets, food insecurity and foodborne diseases is very high and growing in many countries in the WHO European Region. The rise in childhood obesity is of particular concern. I am, however, pleased to acknowledge that Uzbekistan has made considerable progress on many of these fronts.

All over the world, people are eating more industrialized, highly processed foods and less healthy options, notably less fruits and vegetables. The European Region is no exception. We need healthier alternatives to be made available and affordable.

In our Region, more than eight in every 10 deaths and almost 80% of the disease burden are caused by NCDs. Rising rates of overweight and obesity have been reported in many countries in the Region during the past few decades. The statistics are disturbing: in 46 countries in the European Region, more than 50% of adults are overweight or obese.

In children, one in every four may already be overweight or obese, and the problem continues to have the greatest impact among the most deprived groups of society.

It is well accepted that we face a nutrition and demographic transition, with rapid acceleration in the rates of overweight, obesity and diet-related NCDs, yet with persistence of the pervasive effects of undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies, particularly in poor households. This can often coexist with serious food safety problems.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As I said both malnutrition and foodborne diseases constitute a significant public health problem.

In particular, foodborne diseases cause significant illness and death, affecting mostly children and elderly people. WHO estimates that, every year, food- and waterborne diarrhoeal diseases kill about 2.2 million people, 1.9 million of whom are children. Furthermore, within the European Union alone, in 2012 there were more than 300 000 reported cases of foodborne diseases of bacterial

origin. However, I should point out that these figures underestimate reality, owing to limitations in the surveillance systems in all countries.

Foodborne diseases not only adversely affect people's health and well-being but also have negative economic consequences for individuals, families, communities, businesses and countries.

In responding to the health challenges related to nutrition and food safety, WHO strives to support countries in the Region in their endeavours to ensure that the food supply is safe and nutritious.

I would like to continue with some examples.

- In July 2013, ministers of countries in the European Region adopted the Vienna Declaration on Nutrition and Noncommunicable Diseases in the Context of Health 2020, which calls for decisive and concerted action in the promotion of healthier foods. As a result the Regional Office has been working with Member States to development of a new action plan on food and nutrition. It is intended to significantly reduce the burden of preventable diet-related NCDs, obesity and all forms of malnutrition. Its priority actions will contribute to improving food-system governance and the overall quality of the European population's diet and nutritional status.
- The WHO strategic plan for food safety, including foodborne zoonoses, also calls for strengthened surveillance systems and intersectoral collaboration.
- Furthermore, the WHO European strategic action plan on antibiotic resistance emphasizes the importance of addressing antimicrobial resistance also from a food safety perspective.
- As you know, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)/WHO Second International Conference on Nutrition will take place in Rome, Italy, in November 2014 to serve as the global intergovernmental forum to address nutrition issues in the 21st century. The Conference is aimed at accelerating progress towards nutrition improvement within national strategies and broader and effective international cooperation in this area. We urge countries to mainstream nutrition issues as key priorities in their national and international agendas and assume the leading role during the forthcoming Conference.

Excellencies,

I am well aware that nutrition and food safety are among the main priorities of the Government of Uzbekistan, and a number of policy actions are already in place. WHO has worked with your country in the development of a national NCD strategy with an action plan, where nutrition is addressed through a multisectoral approach with a focus on the reduction of salt, sugar and trans fats in food production, marketing and labelling, and the promotion of physical activity.

In addition, WHO is working closely with Uzbekistan in implementing the European strategic action plan on antibiotic resistance, including the food safety aspects.

Finally WHO strongly supports Uzbekistan's participation in Codex Alimentarius, the joint FAO/WHO body setting global food standards.

Encouragingly, Uzbekistan is the most recent country in the WHO European Region to embark on developing a national Health 2020 strategy, based on the regional policy framework and I would like to commend you for that.

I am aware of your discussion of actions in all governmental sectors, and in all of society, in order to shape the health and well-being of the population. This Conference is undoubtedly a fantastic example of the claimed "whole of government" and "health in all policies" approaches that are at

the heart of Health 2020. This means supporting food systems that ensure food security and food safety, improve health, promote sustainability and ensure equity. By doing that you are actually implementing Health 2020, the European policy framework for health and well-being.

I am firmly convinced that, by the end of this Conference, you will strengthen your actions to promote food safety and security, as well as to prevent and tackle obesity and diet-related NCDs under the umbrella of Health 2020.

Ladies and gentlemen, as I close, let me assure you that WHO stands ready to further support Uzbekistan in implementing effective multisectoral interventions in regard to diet-related diseases and food safety.

Thank you.