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**Comments of Finland on
the WHO Draft Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health**

Finland expresses its gratitude for the possibility to comment on the WHO draft Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health, as it was decided by the recent WHO Executive Board meeting.

Finland finds the Strategy timely and important, and congratulates the secretariat for the work carried out so far, Finland looks forward to adoption of the strategy at the World Health Assembly in May 2004 and to its effective implementation.

Finland agrees with the background of the Strategy: The problem is big and the public health potential of sound diet/physical activity strategy is great. Due to the increasingly international and global features involved, international collaboration is needed. The global leadership by WHO is welcome to support the efforts in Member States.

Finland supports a strong global strategy and is generally very pleased with the draft. The Finnish view is greatly strengthened by the experience in Finland in promoting healthier diets and lifestyles. A sustained and comprehensive national action in Finland has led to generally much healthier diets, to greatly reduced rates of cardiovascular and many other major chronic diseases and to much improved public health in the country. The Finnish experience, very much in line with the proposed strategy and well documented in international health literature, provides strong evidence to the proposed strategy.

At the same time Finland wants to emphasize that, in spite of the great progress, much further work is needed also in Finland to have further progress in promoting healthy diets and physical activity, to prevent obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases etc. In this national work a global WHO strategy would be of great support.

After these general comments Finland wants to make some comments that relate to the issues discussed at the Executive Board.

Concerning the scientific base, Finland – recognizing that science base is never complete – finds the evidence extremely strong and a very firm base for the needed action. The WHO/FAO 916 report is in full agreement with the Nordic recommendations. Furthermore the strategy gives a policy framework to implement in Member States the nutrient and food based recommendations that have been nationally agreed upon.

The discussion at the Executive Board touched the question of individual responsibility. Finland naturally agrees on the importance of individual responsibility, but emphasizes that public strategies and actions are needed to make the healthier choices easier. This is especially important for children who cannot decide themselves. Parents, school authorities and other adults have to decide for the children, whose future calls for healthy environments. In health promotion and public health policy both incentives and restrictive measures are needed, in a sound balance. Finland finds the proposed strategy to be balanced, and allows Member States to adapt measures that fit their situations.

At the Executive Board discussion questions were also raised in relation to the reference to Codex Alimentarius. Finland wants to refer to the WHA2003 resolution (WHA 56.23) on the topic: “Urges Member States : (2) to make full use of Codex standards for the protection of human health throughout the food chain, including assistance with making healthy choices regarding nutrition and diet; “. Finland finds that the draft strategy is in accordance with this.

The Executive Board discussion touched also sensitive issues as taxation, pricing and subsidies. Finland finds it important to mention these options as they may be relevant to many countries and situations, and finds the present text generally well balanced.

In the discussion it was also mentioned that the strategy does not address undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies. WHO has for years been working on these issues and much further work is generally needed. However, what is urgently needed is a complementary strategy addressing the growing and strong need for a diet / physical activity strategy to help control the chronic diseases. It should be emphasized that the proposed strategy, when successfully applied, will also help reduce many deficiencies and add to overall sound nutrition policies.

Once more, Finland expresses its gratitude for the possibility to comment. Finland will also in the future be happy to be involved in the work of WHO to promote healthy diet, physical activity and other healthy lifestyles for prevention and control of chronic diseases and promotion of population health.