



**MAURITIUS MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS
GENEVA**

Our Ref: MMG/INT/9/E

27 February, 2004

**H.E Mr. J. W. Lee, M. D
Director-General
World Health Organization
Avenue Appia 20
CH-1211 Geneva**

Excellency,

**Comments of Mauritius on the
Draft Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health**

I have the honour to refer to the decision of 113th Executive Board meeting of the WHO held in January last regarding the above and to transmit hereunder the views of the Government of Mauritius at this stage.

Mauritius considers that the development of a strategy to address the issue of chronic diseases is essential. But it should be comprehensive and holistic in the sense that it should address all related socio-economic and cultural aspects and should be the concern of not only Governments but of society at large and the individual. Moreover, objectivity, fairness, transparency, scientific consensus and stakeholder consultations should guide us in our endeavour.

Regarding the fact that the prevention of chronic diseases be related to the daily diets of all nations, we cannot ignore or dismiss the fact that every society practices a range of diets. Moreover each diet is, in turn, a reflection of among other things, specific social preferences, differences that may exist in the resource endowment of the community, food production patterns and the degree of access by the people to economic opportunities. A "one size fits all" diet is not the solution.

In this context, it is noteworthy that at the recent FAO Committee on Agriculture meeting, the G 77 made the following points:

"G 77 have no predetermined positions on the topic under discussion.....we only wish to uphold the principles of objectivity and fairness on this important topic in an open and transparent manner.....For the sake of better nutrition and health safety, the members of the G77 are open to proposals for changes in the prevailing diets, provided that such proposals are science based, supportive of a better balance in total energy intake, undamaging to national food security, economically affordable, sensitive to cultural heritage, causing no harm to the prevailing food production system, food processing and food trading practices, environmentally friendly and which protect the rights of farmers, herdsman, fishermen and foresters. In addition, such proposals must have the support of the wider scientific community".

The diet and nutrition strategy spans the social, economical, natural resource management, agricultural and antropological domains. The Joint WHO/FAO Technical report 916 which some consider as being the basis for developing a strategy is basically flawed in that it does not consider all these critical elements.

You would note that the report of the FAO Committee on Agriculture held on 9 and 10 February refers to the fact that the Technical Report 916 has not addressed socio-economic and agricultural implications of its recommendations. I am enclosing the Committee on Agriculture Report and the G77 statement made at this meeting.

You may wish to note from the annexed report of the Committee on Agriculture that the majority of members of the FAO expressed the view that the scientific basis of the Expert Report recommendations was inadequate and that the application of its global recommendations at individual country level would need to take into account the specific circumstances of each country. They also questioned whether it was valid to establish population-nutrient intake goals for individual dietary factors in isolation from considerations of energy balance.

Regarding the basis for a global strategy, Mauritius believes that any technical input for such a strategy should be based on works that are universally accepted and on which there is no controversy, dispute or challenge. Technical Report 916 fails on these grounds.

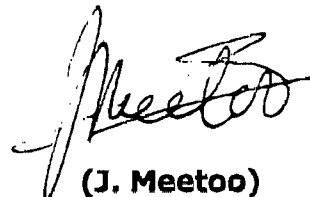
We would draw your attention to the fact that the following consensus reports that do not set specific quantitative limitations may serve as useful basis in the development of a global strategy:

- (i) the Joint US-Canada Dietary Reference Intakes (2002), the FAO's and WHO's own reports;
- (ii) "Carbohydrates in Human Nutrition (1998);
- (iii) "Obesity: Preventing and Managing a Global Epidemic (200); and
- (iv) Preparation and Use of Food-Based Dietary Guidelines (1998).

The implications of the strategy are far too serious to lend themselves to any quick assessment. Indeed, they require a thorough analysis at country and regional level so that each and every country comes up with an informed, reasoned and reasonable decision.

It is our considered view that Technical Report 916 on account of its severe shortcomings cannot be used as a basis for any strategy. However, given our commitment to evolve a strategy, we stand ready to discuss with the experts of your esteemed organisation as well as those of the FAO so as to evolve, after conducting the due process we have described above, a strategy which is science based and takes into account our concerns.

Please accept, **Excellency**, the assurances of my highest consideration.



(J. Meetoo)
Ambassador and
Permanent Representative

**Statement made by G77 at the Meeting of the
FAO Committee on Agriculture: 9-10 February 2004**

**Diet, Nutrition and the Prevention of Chronic Diseases
(Report of a Joint WHO/FAO Expert Consultation)**

Mr. Chairperson, I am making this statement on behalf of the G77 and China. At the outset, I wish to clarify that members of the G77 have no predetermined positions on the topic under discussion. We have no axes to grind and no intention of lobbying for specific food items, whether cereals, meat, fats or sugar. We only wish to uphold the principles of objectivity and fairness on this important topic in an open and transparent manner.

Mr. Chairperson! It is the common goal of all nations, rich and poor, to ensure that their citizens have access to an adequate, energy balanced and healthy diet. Indeed, these three qualities of daily diet underpin the fundamentals of national food security as enshrined in the Declaration of the World Food Summit. We also subscribe to the view that the prevention of chronic diseases be made an integral part of the daily diets of all nations. However, we cannot ignore or dismiss the fact that every society practices a range of diets and each diet is, in turn, a reflection of specific social preferences, differences that may exist in the resource endowment of the community, food production patterns and the degree of access by the people to economic opportunities. Mr. Chairperson! Any uniform or “one size fits all” diet is an illusory concept and not worthy of serious consideration.

Mr. Chairperson! For the sake of better nutrition and health safety, the members of the G77 are open to proposals for changes in the prevailing diets, provided that such proposals are science based, supportive of a better balance in total energy intake, undamaging to national food security, economically affordable, sensitive to cultural heritage, causing no harm to the prevailing food production system, food processing and food trading practices, environmentally friendly and which protect the rights of farmers, herdsman, fishermen and foresters. In addition, such proposals must have the support of the wider scientific community.

Regretfully, Mr. Chairperson, it is the view of G77 that the WHO Technical Report Series 916 fails the test of scientific rigour, objectivity and fairness. We also share the opinion that FAO’s Proposed Follow-up document (COAG/2004/3) is more or less an endorsement of the WHO’s Technical Report. Briefly, Mr. Chairperson, I wish to submit on behalf of the G77 the following comments for the consideration of COAG.

With respect to WHO’s Technical Report Series 916 we wish to register the following observations:

- The findings and recommendations of the report are not based on scientific studies, particularly controlled clinical studies;
- The report is biased in the sense that instead of concentrating on the energy balance of the diet, it labels various food items as good and bad. A priori good items are said to be fish, vegetables and fruits and bad items are said to be fat, red meat and sugar. It concludes,

without any scientific evidence, that bad food is the main cause of chronic diseases. Mr Chairperson! This arbitrary conclusion, apart from its shaky scientific foundation, is indeed prejudicial;

- The supporting data and information for the study is either partial, incorrect and in some cases less relevant;
- The report appears to suffer from serious methodological flaws;
- The report is tinted towards selectivity and has a strong impressionistic tone;
- The report does not make adequate use of early studies completed by WHO, FAO and other renowned institutions in order to substantiate its findings and recommendations;
- The obsession of the report with obesity has undermined another very serious problem facing humanity, namely the presence of 2 billion people all over the world suffering from under-nutrition and micro-nutrient deficiency diseases. It must be pointed out that the fight against obesity is through a better nutrition education and not through arbitrary quantitative recommendations concerning diet;
- Most observers, including FAO, admit that quantitative targets for diet have no scientific base and if the scientific base were to become available, the differences in diet among nations and between groups within each nation are so marked that any recommendation for the percentage distribution of food items in the diet is like walking into a dark alley. This is because the percentage share of a given food item, like fat or sugar, in total calorie may decline but the absolute daily intake may go up due to the enlargement of the total caloric pie. In fact, this is happening in rich countries.
- It would appear that no peer review was conducted and no consultation took place with other stakeholders prior to the publication of the report, such as the International Union of Food Science and Technology that represents more than two hundred thousand members worldwide. Also, relevant institutions in member countries were not consulted on the study;
- The preparatory process to the study was far from being transparent. There was no consultation with member countries on the terms of reference of the study and on the selection of the 24 individuals who submitted background papers to the Expert Consultation. Ironically, only two of the 24 contributors came from the developing regions. Subsequently, 11 of the contributors were selected among the 30 specialists as members of the Expert Consultation and the majority of them were nutritionists. Mr. Chairperson! It appears that none of the 30 specialists had any academic background in anthropology, sociology, economics, natural resources management and agriculture. Moreover, none of them seemed to have had any direct experience in policy work. The G77 finds this arrangement worrisome and completely out of tune with the universal trend towards greater participation and transparency on issues of world importance.
- Mr. Chairperson! The report has failed to trace, analyse and assess the impact of its recommendations on the potential structural changes in world's agriculture, which according to an independent

study carried out by the University of Reading are likely to be substantial and far reaching. I do not wish to repeat the findings of this useful study as copies are made available to the members of COAG and other stakeholders and the main points are recapitulated in the two pages Executive Summary. The International Federation of Agricultural Producers have pointed out to the economic hardships for many of the world's farmers that would arise from the application of the recommendations embodied in WHO Technical Report 916.

Mr. Chairperson! G77 wishes to express its disappointment with FAO's Proposed Follow-up to the WHO Technical Report 916. While welcoming the data in table 2 on page 4, we find the subsequent analysis in Section C of Part II not very convincing. In particular, we find Part III of FAO's paper, pages 5-12, somewhat superficial and as is said in paragraph 15 the product of a "quick assessment".

Mr. Chairperson! The implications of the WHO study are far too serious to lend themselves to any quick assessment. We expected a thorough assessment, reflecting the full impact of the recommendations on future land use, cropping pattern, systems of animal production, use of farm labour, pattern of input use in agriculture, income and price effects and manifestations in food and feed trade. Such impact assessment should be possible considering the data and information assembled by FAO in connection with the preparation of *World agriculture: towards 2015/2030*. If this was not the case, then FAO could have taken more time to complete a thorough and convincing analysis of the recommendations.

In paragraph 51 FAO is seeking COAG's approval on three directions. We do not find these three directions to be of any relevance to the follow-up of WHO's Report. In fact, these are routine activities of FAO's Regular and Field Programmes.

Mr. Chairperson! The G77 is not ready to support any recommendation seeking the revision of WHO Report. What we are ready to accept is a recommendation to WHO and FAO not to rush this issue and take time by seeking the opinion of Member Nations on the report, perhaps through the venue of the Regional Conferences this year. Any future action should await the responses from member countries. Considering the complexity of the subject matter, it is advisable to move forward cautiously and without any haste.

Mr. Chairperson! I am grateful to you for allowing me to make this intervention on behalf of G77.

COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE

(COAG/2004/REP)

Rome, 9-10th February 2004

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Eighteenth Session of the Committee of Agriculture (COAG)(Rome, 9-10 February 2004) was attended by representatives of ... Members of the Committee, and by observers from ... other Member States, the Holy See, representatives of ... United Nations specialized agencies and observers from ... intergovernmental and ... international non-governmental organizations having liaison status with FAO, and from ... institutes of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research. The countries and organizations represented at the session are shown in Appendix

2. In accordance with Rule XXXII of the General Rules of the Organization, the members of the bureau that was elected at the last, Seventeenth Session of the Committee, served in the same capacity for this additional session of the biennium: Mr Costa Ricky Mahalu of Tanzania as the Chairperson of the Committee, Ms Hedwig Wogerbauer of Austria as the First Vice-Chairperson and Mr Mohamed Saeed Mohamed Ali Harbi of Sudan as the Second Vice-Chairperson.

3. The Committee also appointed the following members to the Drafting Committee: Afghanistan, Australia, Bangladesh, Bolivia, Guatemala, Ireland, Japan, Kenya, Malaysia, Mauritania, Mauritius, Sweden, and Turkey. Mr Willem Brakel of the United States of America was appointed Chairperson of the Drafting Committee.

ADOPTION OF AGENDA AND TIMETABLE FOR THE SESSION

4. Several delegations raised their concerns on the objectives of the meeting, including process and follow-up. These delegations also pointed out that rejection of *The Joint WHO/FAO Expert Consultation on Diet, Nutrition and the Prevention of Chronic Diseases*¹ (henceforth referred to as the Expert Report) would lead to rejection of document COAG/2004/3, *FAO's Proposed Follow-up of to the Report of the Joint WHO/FAO Expert Consultation on Diet, Nutrition and the Prevention of Chronic Diseases*. Upon receiving clarification from the Chair, the Agenda and Timetable were adopted.

II. FAO's Proposed Follow-up to the Report of the Joint WHO/FAO Expert Consultation on Diet, Nutrition and the Prevention of Chronic Diseases

5. The Committee took note of the two documents before it: the Expert Report and document COAG/2004/3. The Secretariat noted that, in accordance with standing practice, the Committee was not required to consider the Expert Report for approval or endorsement. Nonetheless, several Members expressed the view that it would be necessary to comment on the Expert Report, in particular due to the nature of its recommendations and possible implications of the recommendations for world agriculture, and on a proposed FAO follow-up. The Committee therefore addressed the two documents together.

6. The Representative of WHO was invited to address the Committee. She explained that the WHO's draft Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health had been considered at its 113th Executive Board in January 2004 and that, after a period of consultation with its members ending on 29 February 2004, the amended draft Strategy would be presented to the 57th Session of the World Health Assembly in May 2004.

¹ WHO Technical Report Series No 916 World Health Organization, Geneva. 2003.

7. The Committee generally acknowledged the growing burden of non-communicable diseases in both developed and developing countries, and that the public health and social expenditures and economic losses associated with these trends were rising. Members made various observations on the Expert Report. It was noted that the Expert Consultation had not been limited to dietary and lifestyle recommendations, but that the socio-economic and agricultural implications of the recommendations had not been addressed. A majority of Members expressed the view that the scientific basis for the Expert Report recommendations was inadequate and that the application of its global recommendations at individual country level would need to take into account the specific circumstances of each country. In particular, these Members questioned whether it was valid to establish population-nutrient intake goals for individual dietary factors in isolation from considerations of energy balance.

8. Many Members supported that the recommendations of the Expert Report could be a useful resource for governments in considering nutritional recommendations, in order to address the growing burden of non-communicable diseases. However, the Committee agreed that the subject is complex and that further studies by Member States at national and regional levels would be required. Members stressed the importance of nutrition education, so that individuals and families could make informed dietary choices.

9. Following these observations, and considering FAO's work in this field, Members called for additional information and analysis to enable them to address, in a more deliberate, science-based manner, the questions that had been raised. It was also suggested that, in accordance with its core mandate, FAO continue its collaboration with WHO on diet, nutrition and non-communicable diseases, and provide Members with policy advice on nutrition and healthy diet, to prevent such diseases. A thorough assessment would be needed in respect of the linkages between possibly changing food consumption patterns and non-communicable diseases, and of the possible effects of changing demand on agricultural production systems and commodity trade, as well as on supply responses through diversification, where appropriate. This should take into account the specificities of individual countries, population groups and dietary patterns.

10. Members agreed that addressing the issue of malnutrition was an absolute priority for FAO, and that adequate resources should be devoted to it and not diverted away from this objective.

11. The majority of Members expressed concern on the financial implications of any follow-up to COAG/2004/3.

III. OTHER BUSINESS AND DATE AND PLACE OF NEXT SESSION

A. OTHER BUSINESS

12. There was no other business.

B. DATE AND PLACE OF NEXT SESSION

13. The Nineteenth Session of the Committee will be held at FAO Headquarters in Rome from 11 to 15 April 2005, as agreed by the Hundred and Twenty-sixth session of the Council.