WHO commends the Special Rapporteur on his excellent report and for addressing the increasing public health problems of obesity and diet-related NCDs in the context of the right to health, as well as the importance of healthy dietary practices for ensuring the health and nutrition security.

Much progress has been made since the 1st International Conference on Nutrition (ICN) was held 22 years ago, highlighting, for the first time, the double-burden of undernutrition, and obesity and diet-related NCD.

Member States have made firm commitments to combat diet-related NCDs, including through the Political Declaration on the Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases adopted by the UN General Assembly in September 2011; the WHO Global Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of NCDs 2013-2020 and a global monitoring framework for tracking the progress in combatting major NCDs and their key risk factors (including diets) adopted by the World Health Assembly in May 2013 as well as the Global Coordination Mechanism and the UN Task Force on NCDs among others.

But significant challenges remain. Access to adequate, safe and nutritious foods must be ensured through efficient, sustainable and nutrition-enhancing food systems.

Food systems must promote healthy dietary patterns by providing year-round access to safe and nutritious foods, while limiting the consumption of processed foods that are high in saturated fats, trans fats, sugars and salt/sodium and therefore, negatively affect nutrition and health.

FAO and WHO will be convening the 2nd International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2) in Rome on 19 – 21 November 2014. The ICN2 will explore how policy coherence for ensuring food systems can be sensitive to and conducive for achieving nutrition security, and will call all relevant stakeholders to action under the leadership of national governments.
WHO welcomes the emphasis in the report on the need to control inappropriate marketing, advertisement and promotion of unhealthy foods. Marketing of unhealthy food significantly contributes to the global increase in obesity, in particular among children. To respond to this challenge, the World Health Assembly has adopted a set of recommendations on the marketing of foods and non-alcoholic beverages to children. In addition, recognizing the important growing burden on obesity related NCDs, a high-level Commission, ‘Ending Childhood Obesity’, has been established by the Director-General in order to create awareness and build momentum for action on this issue.

But it is not just older children that bear the consequences of unethical marketing practices. More than 40 million children under the age of 5 were overweight or obese in 2012. This number will increase to 70 million by 2025 if current trends continue.

Inappropriate marketing of breast-milk substitutes and complementary foods for infants and young children continues unabated in many countries. The promotion of breast-milk substitutes, including infant and other formulas, both to the public and in health facilities undermines exclusive breastfeeding up to 6 months; and violates both women’s right to appropriate information and to informed decision making, and children’s rights to health and to safe and nutritious foods.

Governments must enact legislation, which fully conforms to the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes and subsequent relevant WHA resolutions, and ensure such legislation is properly enforced and monitored. This includes access to legal remedies. To this end, WHO, in close collaboration with UNICEF, will establish a global Code monitoring network to better facilitate international corporation and coordination in assisting countries to ensure effective Code implementation and monitoring.

WHO reiterates its appreciation of the report by the Special Rapporteur and his excellent work during his mandate, and congratulates the Human Rights Council in supporting efforts to address the prevention and control of diet-related NCDs. WHO remains fully committed to contributing to the full realization of the right to adequate, safe and nutritious foods and to health for all.