Your Excellency,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It’s an honour to be here at the United Nations (UN) headquarters. This is a first time for me and for FoodDrinkEurope, the European food and drink organisation, in this important multilateral forum. By being present here today, we would like to show our support and commitment for the contribution to the objectives of the Third High-Level Meeting on the prevention and control of NCDs and the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in general.

Private sector action is indispensable if we want to achieve the SDG 3.4. We cannot look at NCDs in isolation without considering other SDGs, such as those related to poverty (SDG 1); ending hunger (SDG 2); quality education (SDG 4); decent work and economic growth (SDG 8); responsible consumption and production (SDG 12) and partnerships (SDG 17). European food and drink companies are increasingly aligning behind these and other goals, not just as a CSR marketing tool, but the more so as there is an increasing realisation that doing good for health and the planet goes hand in hand with viable and sustainable business benefiting both the economy and the society.

FoodDrinkEurope takes an active role in the promotion of balanced diets and healthy lifestyles by a series of recent initiatives, in areas such as product formulation and innovation (e.g. salt reduction, iron fortification); consumer information; responsible marketing and advertising to children; promoting healthy lifestyles (e.g. through employee well being programmes) and targeted research. Examples of recent activities of our organisation are the development of our Eat & Live Well platform, our Call for Action “Together for More Balanced Diets” and our commitment to political processes such as the Dutch EU Presidency Roadmap on Food Product Improvement.

The saying goes: “if you want to move fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together.” As we have no time to loose, collaboration between the public and private sector can yield fast, far-reaching and therefore cost-effective outcomes. One European example of such success is the Danish Wholegrain Partnership, a consortium of the Danish Ministry of Health, Danish industry, retailers, health NGOs, etc. which managed through concerted action to double the consumption of wholegrain in the Danish population over a period of 7 years. Different sectors accepted the mutual vision and mission while maintaining their own respective interests: government supported research and education, industry delivered on its commitment to fortify products with wholegrain, and health NGOs raised awareness of consumers of the benefits of wholegrain consumption. Attempts are now made to scale this up to a European level.

Indeed, we need governments to create incentives rather than disincentives, based on well-established and robust science and evidence, and help us make an even stronger business case to invest in nutrition and health, creating a positive environment that allow food and drink companies to develop and bring to market new product innovations which contribute to a balanced diet and people’s health overall.

The Third High-Level Meeting on 27 September is an opportunity for political leaders to underline the power of working together towards the common goal to #BeatNCDs – of course with clear rules of engagement. If we want to achieve SDG 3.4, we need to overcome our “simplified enemy narratives”, as dr. Nishtar rightfully said, and urgently start making use of this untapped potential.

Thank you again for this opportunity to participate and listen to the valuable inputs for the process in the run-up to the High-Level meeting in September.

Dirk Jacobs
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