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To all distinguished Permanent Representatives to the United Nations
New York

C/c

H.E. Mr. Philemon Yang

President of the 79th Session of the United Nations General Assembly

Subject:

A Global Call to Empower Citizens and Redesign Obesity Policies at HLM4

Dear Ambassadors to the United Nations,

We, the undersigned scientists and academics, urge you to ensure that the upcoming 4^o UN General Assembly High-Level Meeting on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases (NCDs) handles this escalating global crisis with innovation and practical insight. Obesity, overweight, and eating disorders are rising at alarming rates across all regions of the world. Yet, current policies tend to focus on vilifying specific nutrients rather than addressing the broader determinants of health.

We call for a transformative shift: from restrictive approaches to empowering strategies centered on education, scientific literacy, and personalized solutions supported by cutting-edge technologies. The objective is to build a global culture of balanced living, in which individuals are informed, motivated, and equipped to make daily healthier decisions.

Obesity is a neglected syndemic – a complex, multifactorial crisis contributing significantly to preventable deaths, overburdened health systems, and weakened economies. It undermines individual well-being and national development. Addressing it requires urgent, bold, and forward-looking action.

The Urgency is Undeniable

Over 1 billion people around the world are now living with obesity, with particularly devastating consequences for women, children, and vulnerable

communities, especially across Asia, the Middle East, and the Americas. Even more alarming is the rapid rise among youth: 159 million children and adolescents are affected globally, with rates quadrupling since 1990.

But this is not just a health crisis. It is a looming economic catastrophe. By 2035, the global economic impact of obesity is expected to reach a staggering \$4.32 trillion – nearly 3% of global GDP – a toll comparable to the financial fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

Humanity is now at a critical crossroads. For the first time in modern history, we face the possibility of reversing life expectancy trends – a dramatic consequence of widespread weight gain and malnutrition. This is a wake-up call we can no longer afford to ignore.

Current Approaches are Failing

The policies in place today have proven inadequate, ineffective, and often counterproductive. They overlook the complexity of obesity and its underlying causes, producing unintended and dangerous consequences. In addition, any response should never derail from the fundamental, non-negotiable principles of open societies: individual freedom of choice, market competition, and the pursuit of economic and social prosperity.

The main policy tools used in the last decade – nutrient-based taxes (e.g., sugar taxes), reformulation incentives, and front-of-pack labels – appear outdated and have failed to deliver meaningful results against obesity because they are grounded in a one-size-fits-all approach and address individual nutrients instead of the broader dietary patterns. These so-called “solutions,” instead, have:

- Fostered a top-down regulatory model that attempts to steer consumer choices through coercion rather than education.
- Undermined the spread of knowledge and critical thinking, disempowering individuals from making informed dietary decisions.
- Promoted a universal, standardized diet at the expense of local food cultures and diverse nutritional traditions.

This simplistic approach ignores the real nature of obesity. Rather than addressing the broader context – lifestyle patterns, psychosocial stressors, and individual variability – it narrows the focus to individual ingredients, which are safe and even beneficial to health when consumed in moderation as part of a balanced diet. Moreover, these policies risk promoting nutrient-poor, over-engineered diets, while discouraging consumption of genuine, culturally relevant foods. In doing so,

they may contribute to disordered eating patterns that can be just as harmful as obesity itself.

To reverse these trends, we must move beyond punitive and reductive strategies and embrace policies that recognize the richness of individual diversity and local dietary knowledge. Only through education, scientific inquiry, and personal empowerment can we build effective and lasting responses to this syndemic.

A New Policy Framework is Urgently Needed

Recognizing obesity as a chronic disease: Obesity must be formally recognized as a chronic, multifactorial disease requiring long-term, multidisciplinary care. National healthcare systems must be encouraged and supported to provide comprehensive therapeutic services, ensuring equitable access to prevention, diagnosis, and treatment for all individuals.

Promoting knowledge and balanced diets: Governments – backed by the UN and WHO – must intensify their efforts to promote scientific literacy and critical thinking, empowering individuals to make conscious lifestyle decisions. A key pillar of this effort should be the promotion of balanced dietary models, such as the Mediterranean Diet, the Nordic Diet, or the Atlantic Diet, which offer holistic, flexible approaches to health.

More than a nutritional guideline, the Mediterranean Diet represents a lifestyle method – adaptable across cultures and geographies through the use of local, seasonal foods that replicate its nutritional values. Citizens must have access to this knowledge starting from primary school, with education policies that involve families and foster health-conscious behaviors from an early age.

Investing in personalized nutrition: We are living in an age of extraordinary technological development. Artificial Intelligence (AI), the Internet of Things (IoT), and genomics are unlocking unprecedented opportunities to design personalized diets tailored to each individual's biology, lifestyle, and environment.

These tools can empower people to adopt and maintain a balanced lifestyle aligned with their unique needs and values. However, technological literacy and critical thinking must remain at the core of this process, ensuring that individuals – not algorithms – stay in control of their choices.

Fighting obesity stigma: Public and private institutions must actively work to eliminate stigma and discrimination toward individuals living with obesity. Stigmatization not only undermines personal dignity but also discourages people

from seeking care, worsens health outcomes, and deepens social inequalities. Obesity is not a failure of willpower – it is a disease that requires understanding, support, and access to care.

Advancing diagnostic criteria: Diagnosis of overweight and obesity must evolve beyond simplistic metrics like BMI. A comprehensive approach should incorporate body composition, fat distribution, metabolic markers, and psychological well-being. Only through a multidimensional view can we fully understand and respond to the complex nature of obesity.

Establishing obesity care centers: Governments must create specialized, multidisciplinary care centers for obesity as part of national health systems. These centers should offer integrated, patient-centered services – from prevention to treatment, rehabilitation, and long-term support. The goal is to build a sustainable model of care that is accessible, equitable, and rooted in scientific excellence.

Creating multidisciplinary policy working groups: To address obesity effectively, we need more than medical solutions. Governments and international institutions should establish working groups composed of experts from diverse fields – medicine, public health, economics, education, urban planning, digital technology, behavioral science, and beyond. This will ensure the development of comprehensive, inclusive, and forward-thinking policies that truly empower individuals and communities to take control of their health.

Starting with education: Education is the foundation of prevention. Balanced lifestyle education must begin in early childhood, starting from primary school, and continue through adolescence and adulthood. Families must be actively involved and supported by targeted policies that promote knowledge, responsibility, and health literacy across generations.

Therapy as prevention: Pharmacological treatments for obesity – which are already demonstrating promising results – must be recognized as an integral component of both treatment and the prevention of obesity-related disorders, particularly in severe or resistant cases. However, therapy should never substitute lifestyle interventions, nor justify unhealthy behaviors. It should be seen as a complement to education, support, and empowerment, not a replacement.

Policies for active living: Governments must fight obesogenic environments by integrating physical activity into daily life – not just through sport, but as a cultural norm. Urban spaces should encourage movement: more parks, walking paths, bike lanes, and accessible sports facilities must be developed to make active lifestyles easier and more enjoyable.

Designing balanced cities: Urban planning should become a powerful ally in the fight against obesity. Cities must be designed and regenerated to support balanced living, reducing environmental stressors like air and noise pollution, and encouraging movement for transportation and recreation. New buildings and public spaces should facilitate access to fresh, nutritious foods, mitigate food deserts, and support local, diverse food cultures.

Assessing the full impact of public health policy: Public health measures must be evaluated not only for their medical outcomes, but also for their effects on individual freedoms, economic activity, and everyday lifestyle choices. True progress lies in policies that safeguard health while respecting autonomy and supporting prosperity.

Responsible food promotion and portion size: Food producers, distributors, and industry associations must take shared responsibility. We call for the regulation of promotional activities, especially during protected time slots and in sensitive contexts (such as schools), and for the encouragement of balanced portion sizes aligned with nutritional guidelines as a means to counteract overconsumption.

Ensuring responsible media and social media practices: We call on governments and political leaders to encourage media and social media platforms, in full respect of freedom of the press, to exercise greater responsibility in how they report on nutrition, lifestyle, and public health. Media narratives have a profound impact on personal choices and public perception. It is therefore crucial to avoid the spread of misinformation, ideological bias, or emotional manipulation through sensationalism.

Paid content that promotes commercial interests, or uncritical coverage of dietary trends lacking scientific evidence, must be transparently identified, and critically assessed. In shaping public attitudes on health, media outlets have a responsibility to prioritize the dissemination of reliable, science-based information, guided by professional ethics rather than commercial pressures or viral appeal.

This is a pivotal moment. Together, we have the opportunity to reverse the global obesity crisis – not by futile attempts to force consumers to change their habits, but through empowerment, innovation, and knowledge.

We invite you to lead this transformation with courage and vision – for a healthier, more equitable future for all generations.

We remain fully available for collaboration and dialogue to build a healthier, freer future for all.

Yours sincerely,

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