

Statement delivered by **Pietro Paganini**

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Diseases (NCDs) and the Promotion of Mental Health and Well-being United Nations Headquarters
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Excellencies, colleagues,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak and contribute to this important discussion.

I was pleased to hear that **empowering consumers** is seen as the way forward to reduce obesity and non-communicable diseases.

However, this vision clashes with **current prescriptive policies**, such as taxes, reformulation incentives, and front-of-pack labels, which are often promoted despite lacking solid scientific evidence of their effectiveness.

The only real way to empower consumers is through education, providing people with the tools and strategies to access and process information critically and to make informed decisions about **a balanced diet, understood not simply as food intake but as a broader lifestyle**.

I am aware that education policies have often failed in recent years, largely because they are wrongly perceived as abstract, require sustained commitment and significant investment, and are politically unattractive.

Let's face it: taxing a soda or a snack, red meat, Parmesan cheese or Spanish ham, coconut or palm oil, or placing alarming labels on beer and wine may be more fashionable, more immediate, and often used to ease the moral burden, although it's largely ineffective, as data show.

But today, we have a great opportunity.

We can harness technology: **Artificial Intelligence**, the Internet of Things, and wearables to support people in making conscious, informed choices.

This is what we call precision nutrition, or a personalized diet.

Each of us can now access real-time data about our caloric intake and the quality of nutrients we consume. We can monitor how much energy we're spending, track our glucose levels, and other vital indicators that tell us how we are really doing. We will also know more about other external factors that affect our health, like the quality of the air we breathe. Technology will help us predict what we need to maintain a balanced diet, tailored to our genetics, metabolism, lifestyle, environment, culture,



culinary traditions, and economic conditions. **The good news** is that these technologies are no longer confined to a few wealthy regions. They are increasingly accessible worldwide, empowering individuals and communities everywhere, including in the Global South. No one has to be left behind.

The personalization of diet reflects the multifactorial nature of obesity. Taxes and front-of-pack labels fail to do so. And finally moves us beyond outdated, top-down, one-size-fits-all policies - policies that are not only ineffective but actually pose a threat to personal agency.

- They ignore diversity.
- They do not promote knowledge and individual freedom.
- And they contribute to what I call **the iPhonization of nutrition** - a standardization of food that threatens local culinary traditions and dietary cultures.

My call today is simple:

- Let us seize the opportunity offered by precision nutrition. Technology must be a tool that enhances knowledge and critical thinking, empowering individuals to make informed decisions toward a balanced diet and strengthening personal agency. Policymakers must ensure that technology remains under human control and does not end up dictating choices.
- Let us move beyond the limitations of current, obsolete, prescriptive approaches.
- And let us empower individuals to pursue a balanced and moderate lifestyle, just as in the ancient Greek tradition at the heart of the Mediterranean diet.

P.S. If you truly believe that taxation and childish colorful labels are part of the solution, then let's be coherent: start taxing and adding warning labels to all contributing factors to obesity, including the devices we obsessively hold in our hands, social media platforms, video game consoles, streaming services, and even your living room couch.

Pietro Paganini