



## International Obesity TaskForce

19 November 2010

Dr Ban Ki-moon  
Secretary General of the United Nations  
United Nations Headquarters  
760 UN Plaza  
New York, NY 10017  
USA

Re: Strengthening and harmonising the UN structures for improving nutrition and food environments and outcomes

Dear Dr Ban Ki-moon

The recent alarm amongst the public health community that the UN Standing Committee on Nutrition is at risk of being disbanded because of a lack of funding has caused a great deal of debate about the future of pan-UN efforts to improve global nutrition and food environments. This is particularly salient in the lead up to the High-Level meeting of the General Assembly on Non-communicable Diseases in New York in September 2011.

Over a third of cancers are attributable to unhealthy diets, cardiovascular diseases have major nutrition determinants, and the escalating pandemics of obesity and diabetes are driven by an over-consumption of calories. Thus, the burden of malnutrition, in all its forms of under and over nutrition, is already enormous for all countries. This is likely to increase into the future given the serious threats to global nutritional health posed by climate change, escalating population growth, widening inequalities in global wealth and power, and increasingly powerful commercial influences over public policies.

We ask you to use your unique authority to ensure that that nutrition, and the fight against all forms of malnutrition, has the same level of importance within the UN system as, for example, maternal and child health, malaria, and climate change. These issues are critical for attainment of MDGs. Harmonisation is needed not only among the various nutrition programs in UN agencies but also between all the different stakeholders who contribute to improving global nutrition. So we ask you to play a leading role to help strengthen the UN institutions' ability to make a coordinated, major contribution to improving global nutrition and achieving the MDGs.

The Standing Committee on Nutrition is an established harmonisation body and, with continued and enhanced support, it can become the core of a forward-looking initiative to achieve harmonization and improve effectiveness in the nutrition arena. It is set up to engage constituencies committed to improving public health and human development through nutrition, including governments, health professional and civil society organisations, academic communities, foundations, and also those parts of the private sector with no conflicted interests. Notwithstanding concerns about how the Standing



Committee on Nutrition can best function, we believe that it must continue to be supported and strengthened.

Your intervention to assure this will send a positive, urgently-needed signal around the world and will be widely welcomed in all regions, but especially where double and triple burdens of malnutrition are very high, such as Africa. It will also have major benefits for the children of today and tomorrow who are most vulnerable to undernutrition and stunting in early life and obesity and non-communicable diseases in mid and later life.

We would like to post this letter along with your response, when we receive it, on our website to highlight this issue to our members and we would also be keen to assist in any way to strengthen the Standing Committee on Nutrition.

Respectfully yours,



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