

25 August 2011

His Excellency Ban Ki-moon  
Secretary-General of the United Nations  
United Nations HQ, 760 UN Plaza  
New York 100017, NY, USA

### **UN Summit on NCDs**

Dear Mr Secretary-General

This open letter is written to support you in your determination to ensure that the imminent High-Level Meeting on the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases is a success, and is seen to be a success.

You are right to state that the present and projected epidemics of non-communicable diseases represent a very grave threat to human development.

Overcoming this threat is one of the great challenges now facing humanity. New approaches are needed as well as hard work, in this and the next decade, with all partners united in agreeing that the paramount priority is the protection and maintenance of public health.

Policies and actions also need to address the determinants of nutritional deficiencies and childhood malnutrition, which amplify the risk of subsequent NCDs.

Integrated responses are therefore required. These will need to engage many national government ministries, including of course those of agriculture and health, but also those responsible for finance, foreign affairs, justice, trade, urban and rural development, employment, environment and education.

The High-Level Meeting is clearly designed to lead on to rational and international policies and effective actions, supported, coordinated, and as appropriate implemented by relevant UN agencies and other international organisations, and national governments.

It is evident that the Political Declaration, now in late draft stage, is likely to be a statement of general principles without operational detail.

Some of the central points made in the draft Political Declaration are, however, of great importance and value. First and most basic, there is a proposed agreement for a unified approach to NCDs. This follows many years of work, including a series of UN reports, in which many members of our Association have been engaged.

The draft Declaration repeatedly states that the determinants of NCDs include social, economic and environmental factors. This also is an insight of fundamental importance that creates the firmest foundation for public policies.

To be effective, the general principles need to be translated into operational documents. The development of these documents is properly the responsibility of member states, supported by the relevant technically qualified UN agencies, with WHO, FAO and ECOSOC playing central roles.

The operational documents need to include:

- Quantified targets, staged and monitored over a substantial period of years. The WHO expert working group paper proposing targets for NCD outcomes is a step in that direction. To these should be added coherent goals and timelines for dealing with the underlying and basic causes of NCDs.
- The appropriate quantified targets and goals needed to make policies operational, will vary in different regions and countries, with member states' actions guided by documented evidence of successes at both a national and regional level.
- Experience with tobacco and alcohol shows that substantial improvements in public health require the use of local, national and international laws, statutory regulations and standards designed to protect the public interest and public goods.

The World Public Health Nutrition Association is the representative body for professionals working in the fields of food and nutrition policies and programmes. Our members come from all continents, and are often in a unique position to understand and address drivers of the current NCD pandemic. Many are associated with the UN, including as leaders and members of expert consultations and study groups.

The Association stands ready to support the UN and member states in this crucial new work on the determinants, prevention and control of NCDs.

With kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B M Margetts', written in a cursive style.

Professor Barrie M Margetts  
President