

TACD

TRANS ATLANTIC DIALOGUE TRANSATLANTIQUE
CONSUMER DIALOGUE DES CONSOMMATEURS

The Honorable Tommy G. Thompson
Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services
Room 615F Hubert H. Humphrey Building
200 Independence Ave. SW
Washington, D.C. 20201

Attn: William Steiger

February 19, 2004

Dear Secretary Thompson:

We are writing in reference to the U.S. government position on the World Health Organization's draft Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity, and Health. We wish to advise you of relevant actions by the Transatlantic Consumer Dialogue (TACD) pertaining to this issue. As you know, the TACD is a coalition of more than 65 consumer organizations representing tens of millions of consumers on both sides of the Atlantic.

Recently, the TACD held a conference on obesity, diet, and public policy on 3 February in Brussels, a full report of which will soon be sent to you. The conference was attended by representatives of the U.S. and the EU governments, as well as academia, industry, and other members of civil society. The conclusions of the conference were:

- Combating obesity has become an urgent public health measure. Therefore we must formulate public policies on the basis of available evidence;
- Combating obesity is not primarily a matter of individual responsibility - government has a key role in facilitating improvements in diet by individuals;
- Many government policies have been part of the problem and governments must now be part of the solution;
- Self-regulation by the food industry has been demonstrated to be inefficient and ineffective;
- No one public policy measure by itself, whether it is limits on food advertising to children or better requirements for nutrition labeling on food products, will be effective by itself. Such measures should be part of a comprehensive public health strategy, which deals with the overall food environment that currently leads to unhealthy eating;
- There are a number of successful public policy approaches than have been taken in various regions of the world that have changed public attitudes and helped

decrease consumption of unhealthy foods. For example, the North Karelia project, a project to prevent cardiovascular disease among residents of Eastern Finland, has seen the incidence of coronary heart disease decrease by 65-70% since 1970.

We are pleased that your department has highlighted the seriousness of the obesity issue now confronting consumers world-wide. However, we are concerned about the steps that your department has taken to modify the WHO's strategy and suppress the recommendations made by a team of international experts who wrote the report. Last month, for example, your department called on the WHO Executive Board to approve a resolution that emphasized individual responsibility as the primary way to address obesity.

The research discussed at the TACD conference indicates that obesity should be addressed by governments, and industry, not just individuals. Given the current food environment where high-calorie foods are marketed heavily to children, governments must do their part to control advertising and facilitate healthy eating, as recommended in the WHO Global Strategy.

The WHO Global Strategy simply represents a menu of policy options that countries can choose from to combat obesity. In the interests of public health we urge you to resist interference from commercial concerns and allow the WHO to submit the draft Global Strategy, without amendments, to the World Health Assembly for approval in May. A resolution by the TACD pertaining to this matter is attached for your reference.

We appreciate your attention to this matter.

Yours Sincerely,



Sue Davies
EU Chair of the TACD Food Working Group
Working Group



Bruce Silverglade
US Chair of the TACD Food

cc

Dr. Lee Jong-wook
Director General
World Health Organization

TACD

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Nutrition, and the Prevention of Chronic Disease

The TACD calls upon the governments of the United States and the European Union to support finalization of the draft World Health Organization report on “Diet, nutrition and prevention of chronic diseases.” The TACD particularly urges the US and the EU to support finalization of the public policy recommendations in the draft report which call on governments to combat increases in obesity and other diet-related diseases by taking a variety of measures including tighter controls on food marketing. The TACD further calls upon the US and the EU to reject political pressure from the food and advertising industries who are urging that such public policy recommendations be deleted from the final WHO report.