

TACD

TRANS ATLANTIC DIALOGUE TRANSATLANTIQUE
CONSUMER DIALOGUE DES CONSOMMATEURS

David Byrne
European Commissioner for Health and Consumer Protection
European Commission
Rue de la Loi 200
B-1049 Brussels
Belgium

February 19 2004

Dear Commissioner Byrne:

With reference to the World Health Organization's draft Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity, and Health, we wish to advise you of relevant activities 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 to contribute to declining obesity rates, which deals with the overall food environment;
- 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, contributing to increasing obesity rates.

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 the European Commission has highlighted the seriousness of the obesity issue now confronting consumers world-wide. 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.

We urge you to continue to support the WHO's submission of its 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

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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.