



JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME
FAO/WHO COORDINATING COMMITTEE FOR EUROPE
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LETTER TO THE WHO DIRECTOR GENERAL
Submitted via the European Union

LETTER TO DR TEDROS ADHANOM GHEBREYESUS, WHO DIRECTOR GENERAL

From: United States of America, Member States of the EU, Japan, Canada, Australia, Mexico, and Member States of the Africa Group for the agenda of the 146th session of the WHO Executive Board in February 2020

Subject: Accelerating Efforts on Food Safety – agenda item in the 2020 WHO Governance Cycle

Date: September 18, 2019

Proposal

We, the undersigned Member States, urge a renewed focus on food safety within the governing bodies of the World Health Organization. We request the inclusion of an agenda item on food safety for the World Health Organization Executive Board at its 146th session and the 74th World Health Assembly (WHA). The proponents will seek to develop a consensus resolution under this agenda item. The proposed resolution will build upon resolutions WHA53.15 (2000) and WHA63.3 (2010) and past food safety efforts to increase discussion and consultation with Member States on actionable items for addressing food safety, with a focus on re-invigorating the elements of the 2000 and 2010 resolutions and integrating science and technology into needed public health solutions.

Rationale

WHO estimates that foodborne disease sickens over 600 million and causes over 420,000 premature deaths annually.¹ Unsafe food is deleterious to individuals' health, proper growth, development, healing and recovery. Children under five years of age bear about 40% of the burden of foodborne disease, according to WHO. Safe food contributes to good health. Access to safe food is essential for everyone, including healthy individuals and vulnerable populations such as children, the elderly, ill and recovering individuals, and the immunocompromised.

The critical importance of food safety warrants increased emphasis and renewed focus as a distinct subject by WHO and its Member States. Food safety can play an important role in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and will contribute to relevant areas of the WHO 13th General Program of Work, and efforts to address Universal Health Coverage, and aging, among other areas.

The World Health Assembly adopted food safety resolutions in 2000² and 2010,³ yet the challenges outlined in these resolutions continue to confront us. The capacity and basic food safety infrastructure and services to

¹ World Health Organization (2015). WHO estimates of the global burden of foodborne diseases: foodborne disease burden epidemiology reference group 2007-2015

https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/199350/9789241565165_eng.pdf?sequence=1

² The 53rd WHA (2000) adopted resolution WHA53.15 titled "Food Safety" <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/79081>.

³ The 63rd WHA (2010) adopted resolution 63.3 titled "Advancing Food Safety Initiatives"

<https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/3077>. The resolution called on Member States to develop core capacity as defined by the International Health Regulations, to establish/improve the evidence base for food safety, and to develop/maintain sustainable preventive measures to reduce the burden of foodborne diseases, among other actions. The resolution also called on the WHO Director-General: to implement the WHO global strategy for food safety of 2002; to provide support to Member States in building capacity to improve cross-sectoral collaboration and action along the food-production chain;

minimize and control foodborne risks (such as pathogenic microorganisms, viruses and parasites causing diarrhea, infectious diseases, chemical and other contaminants including natural toxin and agricultural residues) in many countries remains weak; and national food safety systems of many Member States are under development or need to be enhanced, with significant deficiencies in key components such as surveillance, coordinated food safety emergency response, recall systems, and food safety education.

It has been eighteen years since the passage of the WHO Global Strategy for Food Safety and a decade after the last WHA resolution on food safety initiatives. The year 2020 is especially timely to bring the issue of food safety back to WHO governance to refresh past commitments and to address new challenges. The potential of the earlier food safety resolutions remains unfulfilled. The food safety imperatives identified in the 2000 and 2010 WHA resolutions as well as in the Global Strategy for Food Safety cannot be fully realized without sustained efforts, investment, and focus by both Member States and WHO.

All Member States' efforts to enhance food safety- will occur in the context of increasingly complex challenges. For example, there will be more people to feed safely given United Nations projections that the current world population of 7.3 billion will reach an estimated 8.5 billion by 2030 and 9.7 billion in 2050. According to the World Bank, two-thirds of the projected growth in the world's population by 2030 is in the high-food deficit regions of Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, which means that trade in safe food will be critical in these regions. Some countries are seeking to employ digitally enabled food safety systems; attention must be taken to assure countries are not left behind, and to assure the safety of globally-linked food systems. These compelling challenges constitute a call to action.

We believe WHO's enhanced, sustained support and commitment to these activities is essential to advance global food safety.

A resolution on food safety, sponsored and adopted by Member States will assist WHO in prioritizing key food safety activities and aid the Director-General in identifying key food safety priorities. Sponsoring countries believe this is also timely given the WHO transformation and the reorganization, in particular at WHO headquarters. We wish to make clear Member States' prioritization of food safety issues to ensure adequate resources and attention are dedicated to these issues moving forward.

Recent actions supporting this proposal:

The following recent work in food safety supports the importance of this proposal:

- WHO published estimates of the Global Burden of Foodborne Diseases in 2015, providing the first estimates of global foodborne disease incidence, mortality and disease burden in terms of Disability Adjusted Life Years (DALYs);
- The World Bank Report "The Safe Food Imperative: Accelerating Progress in Low- and Middle-Income Countries" (October 2018) estimated that unsafe foods cost low- and middle-income countries \$110 billion in lost productivity and medical expenses annually, and that preventative measures can help countries avoid food safety problems;
- The WHO, FAO, WTO and the African Union convened two International Food Safety Conferences in 2019 (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and Geneva, Switzerland) to identify key actions and strategies to address current and future challenges to food safety and trade globally, and to spur knowledge and innovation for action, (and during which there was widespread support for your statement that food safety is "everybody's business");
- The adoption by the UN General Assembly of June 7 as World Food Safety Day;
- The FAO 41st Session of the Conference decided (June 2019) to increase funding for the Joint FAO/WHO food safety scientific advice programme in the FAO Programme of Work and Budget 2020-21;
- The adoption by the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) in July 2019 of its 2020-2025 Strategic Plan with a focus on science-based international food standards and effective participation by all member countries which underpins the high priority that continues to be placed on food safety and quality by FAO and WHO and guides the Commission in carrying out its responsibilities and unique mandate to protect consumer health and ensure fair trade practices⁴; and
- A discussion paper presented at the July 2019 Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) meeting highlighted ongoing concerns on the issue of sustainable funding for scientific advice to support development of Codex standards. Forty-six Codex Member States co-sponsored the paper, urging all CAC Member States to

and to provide adequate support to the Codex Alimentarius Commission and the International Food Safety Authorities Network.

⁴ The 42nd Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme CODEX Alimentarius Commission (CAC) 2020-2025 Strategic plan <http://www.fao.org/3/ca5645en/CA5645EN.pdf>.

invite their representatives in the WHO governing bodies to highlight the importance of providing enough and sustainable funding for scientific advice from WHO's regular budget, with a view to promoting sound science-based international standards.

While progress has been made to strengthen food safety, much more work is needed at the local, national, regional and global levels within a complex environment of competing priorities and scarce resources to accelerate efforts on key food safety actions. Science, technology and innovation can contribute to the design, management, and sustained implementation of food safety systems and supply chains, and hold promise for improved food safety throughout the global supply chain.

WHO Member States can build upon previous resolutions and past food safety efforts; the momentum from the 2019 International Food Safety Conferences; recent reports and studies; and the work of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, among other developments, to re-invigorate the elements of the 2000 and 2010 resolutions, and to integrate science and technology into needed public health solutions.

Specific areas of focus may include:

1. **Re-invigorating implementation of the 2000 and 2010 resolutions** (e.g., sustainable funding for scientific advice to support the development of Codex standards; fostering Member participation in Codex; encouraging investments in food safety infrastructure, such as improved surveillance systems; generating and including data from all regions in risk assessments)
2. **Providing sustainable funding for scientific advice which underpins the development of science-based Codex Standards.** These standards, , are the international point of reference for food safety regulations and facilitate harmonization of food safety standards;
3. **Building the capacity of national food safety systems in low and middle income countries** to enable every actor of the food system to fulfill its responsibilities in the production and supply of safe food;
4. **Continuous improvement of food safety** as a key component of consumer public health protection in all countries;
5. **Addressing the challenges and opportunities of new technologies** such as blockchain, big data, whole-genome sequencing and data sharing, artificial intelligence and machine learning, real world data, Internet of Things (IoT), etc. to enhance food safety and inform national food safety control systems; and
6. **Addressing the need to mitigate the global burden of foodborne diseases**, such as access to safer food for all populations, including healthy individuals and vulnerable populations

For the aforementioned reasons, the United States of America, Member States of the EU, Japan, Canada, Australia, Ethiopia, Mexico, and Member States of the Africa Group request that WHO add food safety to the agenda of the 146th Executive Board and the 74th World Health Assembly. A food safety resolution at the World Health Assembly is critical for greater international coordination, scaling up national and regional efforts, and engaging Member States at the highest political level in promoting food safety.

Co-sponsors:

- United States of America
- Member States of the EU
- Japan
- Canada
- Australia
- Ethiopia
- Mexico
- Botswana on behalf of the Member States of the Africa Group