

CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



World Health
Organization

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CRD7

October 2016

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JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME

FAO/WHO COORDINATING COMMITTEE FOR EUROPE

*30th Session, 3 – 7 October 2016
Astana, Kazakhstan*

OPENING SPEECH OF WHO

OPENING SPEECH DR MELITA VUJNOVIC, WHO REPRESENTATIVE TO THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN AND HEAD OF THE WHO COUNTRY OFFICE IN KAZAKHSTAN AT THE 30TH SESSION OF THE CODEX COORDINATING COMMITTEE FOR EUROPE (CCEURO)

Excellences – Minister of National Economy of Kazakhstan, Ambassador of the Netherlands to Kazakhstan,
Madam Chair of the Global Codex,

Distinguished Codex members delegates,

Representatives of the Codex secretariat

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear FAO colleagues and dear colleagues from OIE and other international organizations,

Dear WHO colleagues,

It is an honor to speak today, on behalf of the World Health Organization at the Opening of the 30th Session of the Codex Coordinating Committee for Europe.

In the modern world, food is no more only an essential commodity for people's lives. Food today is the centre of important economic activities, which have a huge potential for economic and social development of societies. At the same time with the opportunities that globalization and especially food production and trade globalization provide for economic growth, a new global challenge has emerged. Throughout the world, foodborne diseases today represent a considerable public health burden and challenge. This challenge has been recognized and the World Health Day in 2015 was devoted to foodborne diseases – raising the awareness of the world. The same year, in December, WHO published the first-ever estimate of the burden of foodborne diseases globally and in each of the 6 WHO regions. The report showed that the burden of foodborne disease is significant, throughout the world.

Allow me to focus on the burden of these diseases in European region. It is estimated that every year, in the 53 Member States of the European Region where more than 820 millions people live, more than 23 million people fall ill from eating contaminated food, and 5000 people die each year from food borne infections. The most common foodborne diseases in our European region are diarrhoeal diseases, most frequently caused by norovirus infections, followed by campylobacter. However most of the deaths are due to non-typhoid salmonellosis, very frequently due to the antimicrobial resistance of salmonellae.

These figures show that the agenda of infectious, foodborne diseases is not closed, and strengthened prevention, effective surveillance and management of food borne outbreaks is needed, together with strong capacities for risk communication and raising awareness of the risks and threats due to unsafe food. The data that we have available today can help guide food safety policy and decision-making. It can help

selecting priorities for action, both at the national level and at the European Region as a whole.

In the global world, we have witnessed over the last decade that microorganisms and food contaminants recognize no borders, and disregarding many efforts, outbreaks of foodborne and zoonotic disease have shown that they have international ramifications. In order to respond to these threats effective information exchange and international collaboration is the key. Let me remind us all that we have effective instruments available, one that is known and available to all, are the mechanisms under the International Health Regulations.

Another major public health challenge that is also a food safety issue is antimicrobial resistance (AMR). In May 2015 the 194 Member States of the WHO, adopted at the World Health Assembly the Global Action Plan to tackle AMR. Only last month, the UN General Assembly supported this initiative, and raised the issue of AMR to the rank of threats to global sustainable development.

The action plan adopted by the Member States is holistic, cross-cutting, and covers food-related aspects. In order to respond to the growing challenge of AMR, a close collaboration of several sectors is required. The WHA Resolution adopted in 2015 calls each country to develop a national action plan for tackling the growth of AMR expected to be in place by May 2017 when WHO Secretariat will report to the WHA on the status of implementation.

Distinguished delegates in many of your countries such plans have either been developed or are under development. Allow me to congratulate you here for selecting AMR as the theme for the key note address at CCEURO30, where issues related to AMR and food will be discussed in detail and will have the opportunity to contribute to the global agenda of stopping AMR.

In order to ensure food safety and to stop the growth of AMR, in order to protect public health, intersectoral and interdisciplinary collaboration is needed, that can best be captured in the application of a "One Health" approach. This is an opportune moment – as many instruments and frameworks are available - the European policy framework for Health and wellbeing – Health 2020, and the Sustainable Development Agenda and its goals which are complementary and which we are committed to achieve by 2030.

The Future Codex activities can support the efforts for achieving these tall objectives. Allow me to mention specifically SDG 2.1 which aims to ensure that safe food is available for all people. Achievement of this goal will also contribute to achievement of other goals such as SDG 1 (to reduce poverty), and SDG3 (health and wellbeing) and SDG10 reducing inequalities, but we can say that its achievement will contribute to practically every SDG as they are so interconnected, and will present an important element for the sustainable development.

Your deliberations and conclusions over the next days will make an important contribution to the overall work of the global Codex, to the work of the United Nations and to achievement of sustainable development agenda. I wish you constructive deliberations, a successful meeting, and a pleasant stay in Astana and Kazakhstan.