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Thank you, Mr. / Ms. Chair.

I am grateful and honored to have the opportunity to address the conference of WHO and FAO on behalf of Israel, and to describe some of our activities in the fields of nutrition and food security – two very important issues in society and public health today.

Nutrition and food security are top agenda items within health, welfare, agriculture and finance ministries throughout the world. We are challenged to constantly update our approach and seek the most effective interventions in these fields. Obesity and lack of food security are the leading causes of Non Communicable Diseases and can be treated effectively through public health policies and facilitation of lifestyle changes. The fight against NCDs must be a community-wide effort, which would be mobilized by both the public and private sectors. The international community, too, can and should play an important role in helping countries reach global and national health targets.

Israel has achieved remarkable successes in the fight against malnutrition and food insecurity through policy decisions and actions of its National Nutrition Council and financial efforts such as: food distribution to poorer sectors of the population, and by expanding the school lunch program so as to reach more than 300,000 pupils on a daily basis. We have done so by allocating the appropriate resources to this battle, and by

establishing channels for efficient cooperation between the national Government as well as local non-governmental organizations.

The Public Health Services of the Israel Ministry of Health, together with the Israel Center for Disease Control carries out national health and nutrition surveys, and based on the results of these surveys and other information sources, health and nutritional policies are established. An iodine survey is also planned, as is an ongoing Food Security survey. As a further means of monitoring the nutrition status of the population, several registries have been established.

Public health experts work closely with the Ministries of Education, Environment and Welfare on nutrition-related concerns. Thanks to an enabling legislative and regulatory environment, we are able to cooperate with academia and with the general community in conducting national awareness campaigns related to public health concerns. Programs to encourage breastfeeding and programs aimed at fighting childhood obesity have been introduced. Communication with the public is enhanced with the use of social media.

In 2011, the Government of Israel initiated a comprehensive national health promotion program with specific targets for the years to come, and allocated budgets accordingly. The Ministries of Health, Education, Sports and Agriculture are the main leaders of this national plan which aims to improve nutrition and increase physical activity among different target populations. We found that setting concrete benchmarks and goals and ensuring dedicated and sustainable budgets are the most effective ways to lead the deep societal change that is

required to achieve these targets with the corporation of the food industry.

The Ministry of Education has passed legislation banning the provision and sale of unhealthy foods in schools, and has introduced legislation regulating types of foods included in school meals, to ensure compliance with Ministry of Health sensible nutrition guidelines.

The food industry began reducing salt content in selected foods within 11 food categories, including breads and dairy products, aiming at a 20% reduction in the average sodium intake of individuals within five years. Most of the leading food manufacturing companies have joined this initiative. A significant source of salt in the Israeli diet is that consumed as a result of the kosher processing of meat, involving considerable amounts of salt. Very intensive efforts are being made with the full cooperation of the meat processing plants to reduce this source of dietary sodium intake. The Ministry is currently carrying out a national survey, involving 24 hour urine collections, to assess true sodium intake levels.

The Public Health Service is working intensively with the health care providers, hospitals, and health funds to incorporate dietitians and health promoters in all needed parts of treatment according to western international standards. Guidelines for identifying and referring patients at risk for nutritional deficiencies have been prepared. All geriatric and long term care institutions are required to retain services of a dietitian. We have also developed guidelines and food baskets for emergency feeding, including for the needy elderly.

Our Food Control Service administration is developing a policy regarding interpretative front-of-package labeling. Discussions with the Communication Ministry have focused on adopting standards related to advertising of foods to minors.

The Ministry of Finance is working with the Ministry of Health to explore opportunities to add taxes on unhealthy foods, and decrease or regulate the prices of healthy foods such as whole wheat bread.

We are also making progress in promoting physical activity. The performance of municipal administrations is now evaluated, in part, based on their ability to increase the number of residents engaged in daily physical activity.

The public healthcare system plays, of course, a central role in these efforts. Healthcare providers and insurers are now evaluated also on their preventative care efforts – be it screening for BMI and obesity or encouraging adoption of healthier lifestyles. Financial incentives have also been offered to the healthcare providers, so as to also encourage them to offer group therapy for weight loss and diabetes treatment and prevention.

Mr. / Ms. Chair,

Our former Prime Minister, Golda Meir, famously said that she never accomplished anything alone, and that all her successes were achieved collectively.

Israel highly values our continued collaboration with the international community on Public Health matters. We are proud members of WHO, and we were honored to host WHO meetings. Israel is willing to share its expertise with other countries.

We look forward to continuing our joint work towards a world free of the scourge of malnutrition obesity and NCDs.

Thank you.