

Second International Conference on Nutrition, ICN2

General debate (Wednesday, 19 November)

POLAND

Dr Igor RADZIEWICZ-WINNICKI

Undersecretary of State, Ministry of Health

Mr. President,

Honourable Madam Director General of WHO,

Honourable Director General of FAO,

Honourable ministers,

Excellences,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, let me thank FAO and WHO for organizing this conference and giving us the opportunity for raising the major nutrition challenges in the 21st century.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The essence of the world's food problem lies in the large number of people who are chronically undernourished and overweight. The paradox is that there are about 805 million people who don't have enough food to eat, and at the same time 1.4 billion people are overweight, including 500 million who suffer from obesity. This is a record in the history of mankind.

Reducing malnutrition in all its forms remains one of the greatest development challenges for many countries worldwide. Malnutrition impairs human immune system and renders people more vulnerable to sickness and death. Even in developed countries this problem is still present, in many cases affecting children. In Poland, as a response to this problem, government has adopted, among others, the *Long-term State Programme for Feeding* aimed at children and youth from low income families or families in a difficult financial situation.

Overweight and obesity is the next problem we have to face. It is continuously growing health problem and at the same time a key risk factor for a range of chronic diseases. This makes it one of the leading threat to human development - not only in terms of health but also in terms of economy.

In Poland, we have observed a steady increase in the proportion of population that is overweight and obese. Today over 50% of Poles suffer from overweight and obesity, so we face a real epidemics. Particularly unfavourable situation is observed in the population of children and adolescents – today, with regret, we can confirm our previous assumption that the current generation of children will live shorter than their parents. This is a situation we have never faced so far.

Happily, we observe the positive trend of increase of social awareness - more and more people talk about and practice healthy lifestyles, including rational nutrition and physical activity. It is very satisfactory that malnutrition is high on our political agenda. The new Polish Prime Minister, the former Minister of Health, Ms Ewa Kopacz, underlined, in her exposé few weeks ago, the necessity to halt the negative trends of overweight and obesity. Furthermore, the Parliamentary Group on Counteracting Obesity was established. The group works on the necessary legal changes enabling halting the epidemics.

Polish health policy in relation to nutrition has been an important component of the National Health Programme for 2007-2015. This strategy has been elaborated to unify the efforts with the aim to reduce the inequalities in health and to improve the state of Poles' health. It defines, among others, the actions needed for improving nutritional habits of the population, ensuring access to high quality food, reducing prevalence of obesity and increasing physical activity. To implement the programme the Intergovernmental Coordinating Board was established.

Children, as a particularly vulnerable group are at heart of policy makers. The ubiquitous advertising of foods high in fat, salt and sugar forced us to take a radical steps. In a close cooperation with the National Broadcasting Council we are working on regulating the form and scope of marketing aimed at children.

At this point I should mention about self-regulation of the Polish food industry. We gladly notice this important step and we hope that such voluntary code of conduct will match the legal changes to be introduced soon.

We are fully aware that multiplying the bans cannot be the sole tool of health policy. It is also important to educate and empower people. The educational actions have been undertaken in Poland for several years, yet we see the necessity of strengthening them, especially in primary schools and kindergartens.

Shaping good nutritional habits in children results in healthy adults, so we consider the youngest as crucial target group. This is also reflected in our legislative work.

Currently the Polish Parliament works on a draft amendment to *the Act on food safety and nutrition*. The amendments concern the quality of food and nutrition in kindergartens and schools. The regulations will apply to sales restrictions of foods high in fat, salt and sugar, in school shops and vending machines as well as a proper nutrition in school cafeterias. This is the first step towards a comprehensive change in Polish health-enhancing nutritional policy.

When we consider the present situation related to nutrition in Poland we cannot announce the full success. We haven't won the war with obesity and many battles are still ahead. Also, we are aware that results won't be seen quickly and many years may pass to prove whether we actually were successful.

We hope that strong political determination to change the unfavourable trends, active engagement of many stakeholders, including vital role of many NGOs, and strong social support for these actions will bring the expected results as soon as possible. Let's hope that during the next ICN we will all share the success stories and not the examples of failure policies.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Policies alone, however sound and well crafted, are ineffective without means and resources to turn them into specific, effective and scaled-up actions. The time has come when these strategies and policies should be implemented and we are obliged to do our best, speaking with one voice across sectors, to ensure a proper nutrition for the good health status of ourselves and the future generations.

Mr. President,

Honourable Madam Director General of WHO,

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Government of Poland I would like to thank FAO and WHO for the hard work which has been done on the Rome Declaration. I truly believe this document will become our guidelines leading to improve nutrition and health of the worldwide population.