

Plenary Remarks for the Record

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United States Formal Remarks at the Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2) - Delivered by Under Secretary Kevin Concannon, United States Department of Agriculture

Thank you Mr. Chairperson, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you all for the work put into this conference and the Political Document and Framework for Action.

Since the first International Conference on Nutrition, our collective efforts have made progress on improving nutrition, specifically undernutrition, but that progress has been slow. We are all familiar with the statistics: One in four children across the globe are stunted; two billion people suffer the hidden hunger of micronutrient deficiencies; 45% of all under age five deaths are due to undernutrition; and today, over 42 million children are overweight or obese. These numbers are sobering and should be unacceptable. These numbers reflect unfulfilled potential –and in many cases suffering—for billions of children, our children.

These figures are a call to action that must drive our shared work. Nutrition is easily forgotten among acute crises like conflict and natural disasters; yet nutrition is vitally important to our resilience and productivity across the world. Our hope is that this Conference will reenergize our collective action against malnutrition to make real, sustained impact on improving nutrition across the globe. Nutrition is a basic building block for development, and we believe the work of this Conference should feed strongly into the discussions on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. Everyone present today – governments, international agencies, civil society and the private sector – should consider how they can best use the outcomes of this conference to guide the policies and actions that will define their respective efforts to eliminate malnutrition.

Nutrition is a key element of the United States' domestic and international programs. As an example, for over 40 years, the U.S. Special Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) -- one of the most successful, cost-effective and important domestic nutrition and health interventions in the United

States -- has reduced infant mortality rates and improved pregnancy outcomes, and serves half of all infants born in the United States, half of the births in the United States each year. Our Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) uses food vouchers to make healthy food accessible to more than 46 million low-income people every day across the United States. For its 50 years of existence, it is responsive to the economic circumstances of families and has a special budgeting status to support the program.

In the United States, we are confronting an epidemic of obesity and non-communicable diseases associated with poor diets. First Lady Michelle Obama's Let's Move! initiative seeks to solve the problem of childhood obesity in a generation and works to improve the overall nutrition in our country's school nutrition programs directly feeding more than 30 million students each day and overseeing the food sold in schools during the school day for over 50 million students.

Nutrition is important across the full course of life, and the U.S. now includes pregnant women, infants and children from birth to 24 months in the future expanded Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

Internationally, the United States has prioritized nutrition in President Obama's global food security and hunger initiative, Feed the Future, which last year helped nourish 12.5 million children. Other initiatives that we are proud of include the 1,000 Days Partnership, which focuses on the critical nutrition window from a woman's pregnancy through her child's second birthday and our 10 billion dollar pledge at the 2013 Nutrition for Growth Summit.

Earlier this year, the United States released a Multi-Sectoral Nutrition Strategy to guide the work of our international development and humanitarian assistance programs. We firmly believe that a multi-sectoral approach is vital to improving nutrition outcomes and to combating the multiple burdens of malnutrition.

We must build healthy food systems that provide the right nutrients to all people, and we must work together with the private sector – whether small-holder farmer or small-, medium- or large-scale firms and non-governmental organizations - both small and large - to do so, understanding that an open and transparent global trading system is essential. Our efforts must also factor in emerging trends like urbanization, our approach must be as dynamic and flexible as the constantly changing world in which we live.

Finally, nutrition cannot be an afterthought or secondary objective. Making nutrition central to our shared vision and approach to development will help us to create a food system that allows humanity everywhere to reach its potential, and not just survive, but thrive.

Thank you.