

Tonga National Nutrition Statement

Your Royal Highnesses, Your Excellencies, Distinguish delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen.

As one of the smallest nation of the Conference, with it's location in the vast South Pacific Ocean, it is only befitting that the speaking time allocated for oceanic Kingdom of Tonga, should be proportionally much much less than 5 minutes. Hence, my immense gratitude, for the given opportunity, to present the national statement for Tonga.

Strangely enough, our geographical isolation has always been our comfort, our buffer protection zone, between the islands of Tonga, but also between Tonga and the rest of the world. But in this day and age of Globalization, and it's inter-connectivity, speed of communication, travel and trade, has proven to be not the case anymore.

The nutrition issues and problems reported from the developing countries of the world, of obesity, malnutrition, etc., can be easily found in the Kingdom of Tonga. The double burden of over-nutrition and under-nutrition, and it's health impacts is massive for Tonga. In 2004, the WHO STEPS survey reported that the prevalence of obesity and high blood pressure in the adult population of Tonga is relatively very high. For obesity it's about 77% for women and 61% for men, and for high blood pressure, it's about 20% for women and 27% for men.

In addition, the prevalence of adults consuming less than 5 serves of fruits and vegetable per day is also very high, about 68% for women and 71% for men. Similarly, the prevalence of physically inactive adults is also very high for Tonga, about 50% for women and 35% for men.

The consequences of this lethal combination of these high risk factors for health is indicated by the increase prevalence of diabetes in Tonga, from 7% in 1973 to 18% in 2004 and I am quite confident, that it will be more than 20% by next year.

In 2011, the WHO Burden of Disease study revealed, that the main cause of death in Tonga, is due to Non Communicable Diseases, estimated to be about 79% of all deaths in Tonga. That is about 4 in 5 deaths is due to NCD and the age group of the duing is creeping into the younger generation.

However, in terms of malnutrition, the prevalence of anaemia in children and female population of Tonga, was also found in 2004 to be relatively high, 11% for children and 37% for women.

And the main cause of both the under and over-nutrition in Tonga, is the increasing shift of diet from the traditional food to imported foods. From the traditional foods that is low in energy, sufficient in vitamins, minerals and fibre to the imported foods, that are high in energy and fat but low in vitamins, minerals and fibre.

The HIES statistical data shows the trend of food import to Tonga is increasing from year to year. Therefore, the double burden of nutrition in Tonga is huge, from the big financial drain on imported foods, the increasing medical cost, to the loss of human potential but also of human lives.

In addition to the World Food summit in 1996, 2004 and 2009, Tonga participated in the Pacific Food Summit in 2010 and finally convened a National Food summit in 2011. As a result, the Ministry of Health in partnership with other ministries, civil societies and communal groups, is leading the multi-sectoral fight against the adverse health impacts of the double burden of nutrition.

It has legislated an increase tax on imported unhealthy food products to reduce it's affordability and accessibility. The ministry of agriculture has aligned it's drive in agriculture to promote the increase production of fisheries, livestock, vegetables and fruits, hence to increase availability of local healthy food.

It's new Food legislation is mandated to assure the safety and quality of both the local and imported food trades, but especially with the Codex Alimentarius food standards, guidelines and recommended codes of practice as it's default. The ministry of internal affairs is increasing national sport competitions for women and youths. As a result, the WHO STEPS surveillance, reported that the people of

Tonga eating more fruits and vegetables now; are more physical active now; and obesity prevalence is going down a little bit. This is indeed, a promising sign that Tonga is on the winning track against this evasive and formidable opponent called nutrition.

Finally Chair, Tonga expresses it's sincere appreciation and applaud the FAO and WHO, for the perfect timing of the 2nd International Conference on Nutrition. On behalf of Tonga, I hereby pledge our full support for the adoption of the Rome Declaration. The Rome Declaration will widen and consolidates our drive on nutrition to be not only nationally inclusive but to be also sustainable nationally.

It will provide assurance of the continuum of the current momentum, to the post-2015 millennium development goals era. The Rome Declaration will be, Chair, Distinguish Delegates, it will also be, a guiding light of hope not only for the people of Tonga, but for it's future generation also.

Thank You Chair