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PRESS RELEASE

European ministers urged to act decisively on obesity

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Health and consumer organisations are calling on governments to introduce tougher measures to combat overweight and obesity as ministers gather for the first pan-European summit on obesity in Istanbul today.

Ministers and their national delegations from the 53 Member States of the World Health Organization European Region are meeting from November 15-17 and are expected to adopt a European Charter on Counteracting Obesity.



Rising rates of obesity are now posing a threat to the economies of many countries facing an increasing burden of disease. The health problems caused by excess weight lead to a wide range of debilitating and life-threatening conditions such as type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and cancer. It is estimated that 150 million Europeans will be affected by 2010, 25 million more than a decade earlier. The number of overweight and obese children is increasing at the rate of 1.2 million children each year and childhood obesity is expected to affect one in 10 within five years.



European Association for the Study of Obesity

In a joint statement, non-governmental organisations urged health ministers to take strong and decisive steps to halt the rise in childhood overweight and obesity.



NGOs welcome the fact that participants at the meeting will include not only ministries of health, but also trade, agriculture, economy, transport, sport, urban planning, labour, education and finance and local government. If the escalation in obesity is to be reversed, all government sectors and levels must play a role since obesity is the result of many social, economic and environmental factors which together contribute to poor quality diets and reduced physical activity levels.



But to date there has been a wholly inadequate response to the obesity crisis. Introducing effective preventative action should be made top priority across all ministries and all sectors of society. The consequences will cripple our health care systems, our economies and our society in general if we fail to act.



"We urge governments to recognise that progress will only be made when policies across all government departments shape environments so that healthy choices and healthy lifestyles become easier," says Lara Garrido-Herrero, Secretary General of the European Public Health Alliance.



In a Europe where almost one in three children is already overweight or obese, the health of the present and future generations is being seriously undermined. Health and consumer NGOs support the call for legislative solutions including



restrictions on marketing of foods high in fat, sugar and salt to children and a strong international code on marketing to children to provide part of the framework for a raft of national and regional measures that are urgently needed.



Governments must recognise their responsibility to regulate marketing to children, who are increasingly targeted via the internet as well as via television and other practices such as viral marketing. Tackling obesity requires a strong lead from governments and strong action from all sectors if we are to avert one of the biggest public health threats of the 21st century. **ENDS**



International Diabetes Federation
European Region

NOTE TO THE EDITOR

Images to illustrate story available on request. For photo-opportunities please visit the NGO information stand at the World Health Organization Ministerial Conference on Counteracting Obesity, Conrad Hotel, Istanbul, 14-17 November 2006. An event on marketing of unhealthy foods to children will be held on 15th November 2006 at 13.00 in the Conrad Hotel Istanbul.



International Obesity TaskForce

QUOTES AND FURTHER INFORMATION

The following are contactable throughout the Ministerial Conference 14-17 November 2006 and afterwards -



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Setting higher medical standards

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