



**IOTF**

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **INTERNATIONAL CODE NEEDED TO PROTECT CHILDREN FROM INTERNET AND TV MARKETING EXCESSES**

Youngsters should be protected from exploitative marketing techniques used on the internet as well as from television advertising as part of an all out bid to halt the rise in childhood obesity, according to a new report from the public health think tank, the International Obesity TaskForce released today.<sup>1</sup>

With the global epidemic of obesity already triggering the development of type 2 diabetes in increasing numbers of children, the IOTF, part of the International Association for the Study of Obesity (IASO), said an internationally enforceable code was needed to give clear principles for governments, industry and others to follow.

IASO agreed during its International Congress on Obesity taking place in Sydney, Australia, this week, to demand a ban of all advertising of junk foods and non-nutritious foods aimed at children.

The call to action is also being considered by members of the **Global Prevention Alliance**, a consortium of concerned NGOs. The Alliance includes the World Heart Federation, the International Diabetes Federation, the International Pediatric Association and the International Union of Nutritional Sciences, led by IASO. It works to combat childhood obesity and obesity-related chronic disease through high level policy initiatives, with a global network of national Alliance groups.

The proposal calls on WHO member states to ask WHO to take the lead, with other UN agencies, governments, international partners and other stakeholders, to develop international standards to protect children.

Alongside the think tank report, an IOTF group today launched its draft recommendations - the *Sydney Principles* – proposing a range of actions that governments, the private sector and international bodies like WHO should take. These include proposals that government should:

- *Support the rights of the child to adequate safe and nutritious food*
- *Provide substantial protection to children against commercial exploitation*
- *Implement statutory measures rather than rely on self regulation*
- *Take a wide definition of promotion to include all marketing techniques, including the internet*
- *Commit to commercial-free schools and other settings*
- *Include cross border media to regulate satellite, internet and terrestrial broadcasting*
- *Monitor and enforce compliance with a new international code*

Professor Boyd Swinburn, President of the Australasian Society for the Study of Obesity, who convened the IOTF group which developed the proposals, said: "At the moment, the need to protect children from commercial exploitation was being largely overlooked by the food and advertising industries. We need to recognize that everyone in society has a responsibility to ensure we provide healthy environments for children, and also to seek the highest standards." They would be inviting feedback from the congress delegates in Sydney, and was consulting more widely with interested parties, before publishing a final paper on its findings.

The IOTF report highlighted the failures of self-regulation favoured by industry, because self regulation lacked the means to control the “cumulative effect” of intense marketing targeting children. Dr Tim Lobstein, coordinator of the IOTF’s childhood obesity working group, and author of the new report, said that powerful evidence was emerging of the way in which advertising games on the internet were being used to bypass even the present minimal standards of conduct adopted by food and beverage advertisers.

Research undertaken by the Kaiser Family Foundation in the USA found that 85% of businesses advertising to children on television also had interactive websites for children promoting branded products, which incorporated not only games but promotions, using viral marketing techniques, membership opportunities, as well as movie and television tie-ins.<sup>ii</sup> Over 12.2 million children had visited commercial websites promoting food and beverage products over a three month monitoring period last year. In the UK the Food Commission found that most major food brands had sites designed to attract children as young as six years old.

A separate new analysis of the use of the internet to target children has revealed that even existing weak voluntary advertising codes are being breached routinely on websites targeting children. “While the regulators, or even the industry itself in various countries, through self-regulation, has regulated advertising to children and pledged responsible marketing to this segment, the same advertisers appear to forget the promises as soon as they are advertising online. As such, they are in breach of the spirit of the current self-regulatory provisions that apply to other forms of marketing communications”, a team of marketing experts from the Middlesex University Business School concluded in their report, *Analysing Advergaming: Active Diversions or Actually Deception*.<sup>iii</sup>

The Middlesex report highlighted the use of pressure to purchase, with some websites requiring purchases before children could play online games, and one popular children’s sweet brand requiring children to find the magic code. “This practice would appear very dubious, as this practice appears to clearly entice young consumers to purchase the products – a point that is clearly ruled out in the code of conduct,” the authors observed. Viral marketing downloads and links from advergaming to corporate websites were “against the spirit of the self regulation system’s provisions,” they added.

The authors concluded: “While it is relatively easy to control the content of television and print advertising, controlling the content of online advertising, and advergaming with different levels in particular is a lot more complex and demanding on a regulator. At the same time the global reach of the internet throws open the question who should ultimately regulate such websites, and which code of conduct should they follow?”

The need for WHO to deal with the issue of marketing to children was recognized in the WHO Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health approved unanimously by ministers at the World Health Assembly in 2004. WHO is preparing to publish a report on marketing to children after it convened a conference and expert consultation held in Oslo in May 2006; WHO is also inviting European Health Ministers to adopt a Charter on Obesity in November, which will include reference to the marketing issue.

“The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child requires that children should be protected from economic exploitation and also defines how the advertising world should not take advantage of the gullibility of children. “We need to take a much firmer position in tackling this. If we are to succeed in the halting the global epidemic of childhood obesity, we must challenge all governments, the whole of the business world, and society at large to join with us in tackling this together,” said Neville Rigby, director of policy and public affairs of the IASO.

The IOTF briefing on marketing to children is available for download from the IOTF website:  
[www.iotf.org](http://www.iotf.org)

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<sup>i</sup> International Obesity TaskForce: Marketing to Children Briefing Paper September 2006. Download:  
<http://www.iotf.org/documents/iotfmarketingbriefsep2006.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> Kaiser Family Foundation: Child's Play: Advergaming and the Online Marketing of Food to Children July 2006. Download: <http://www.kff.org/entmedia/upload/7536.pdf>

<sup>iii</sup> Stephan Dahl, Lynne Eagle, Carlos Báez: - Analysing Advergaming: Active Diversions or Actually Deception. Middlesex University Business School May 2006. Download:  
[http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=907841](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=907841)

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