

NCD Side Event (27th September morning)

**Intervention by Dr Rajitha Senaratne, Hon Minister of Health,
Nutrition and Indigenous Medicine, Sri Lanka**

Madam Chair?, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen

As a co-chair of the WHO high level commission on NCDs, Sri Lanka fully supports the speedy implementation of the proposals in the report produced by the commission.

It is a “time to act” for all of us, and go ahead with our fight against NCDs with full vigour. In the highly competitive market economies of today, the dietary patterns of our people have changed from less refined, wholesome diets in the past, to highly refined convenience foods produced with modern technology and with the help of not so healthy food additives and ingredients. Aided by aggressive marketing strategies, we are more likely to go for convenience foods which are palatable, but often unhealthy due to relatively high content of salt, trans-fats, sugar etc. This is the battle we have to support our populations to fight. The most important thing is to make healthy palatable food more available at an affordable price. The increasing trend of marketing products labelled ‘Chemical Free’, ‘Organic’,

'Natural' etc. with a profit motive, compromising availability and affordability of the produce to the average consumer is not a healthy development. On the other hand governments have to closely monitor the authenticity of the certification processes so that the discerning consumers get 'value for money'. So we have to find ways to ensure adequate supplies of vegetables and fruits grown in a safe environment are available to the consumer at an affordable price all year round.

The other area we all must work on is in making the unhealthy food choices less affordable or unpopular. Sugar is a known 'killer' as excess consumption of sugar lead to cardio vascular complications linked to being over-weight and diabetic. I believe Increasing sugar tax should be considered a **best buy** and hence should be included in our NCD agenda. One problem we have faced in our fight against trans-fats is the technical snags in correctly and accurately identifying levels of trans-fats in foods. On the other hand, even though the informal food industry uses higher levels of trans-fats in their products than the established food manufacturers, we have found regulating the sector a daunting task.

Salts in food can be controlled by legislation and Sri Lanka is working in this area. We are also planning on a media campaign to make people aware of the importance of reducing individual salt consumption.

Our efforts in promoting healthy eating habits, increased physical activity and regular screening for NCDs, we believe, would eventually take us towards success. In conclusion I would like to invite all the global leaders to join hands in winning the battle against NCDs by swiftly implementing the recommendations contained in the report.

Thank you