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A64/21 Agenda item 13.12: WHO's role in the preparation, implementation and follow-up to the high-level meeting of the United Nations General Assembly on the prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases (September 2011)

Chairperson, Director General, honorable delegates,

We appreciate the opportunity to address the 64th WHA on behalf of Consumers International, global federation of consumers worldwide and an IBFAN founding member.

We welcome WHO's objective of raising the profile of NCDs. We hope that the summit in September will empower member states to take action to support consumers in eating a healthy diet, including: protection from harmful food marketing, reformulation of foods, improving consumer information and removing the obstacles to breastfeeding.

It is of the utmost importance that nutritional standards and definitions used in policies to improve consumer diets are developed independently of any conflict of interest. Similarly the monitoring of such policies must be government-led and independent of companies, who have disproportionate power compared to WHO and many Member States. This is particularly true in the case of food marketing. Some of us have years of experience with multi-stakeholder initiatives. We have seen how health priorities are distorted when they have to be agreed by the for-profit sector. Goal posts shift towards more subtle and pervasive forms of marketing such as sponsorship – all designed to build trust and promote slightly "better for you" junk foods. It is essential that while action is stepped up to address NCDs, care is taken to increase consumer protection and avoid giving the for-profit sector unprecedented opportunities to influence policies. The effect of insufficient vigilance will be felt most keenly in food-related NCDs - where Member States urgently need encouragement to take effective legislative action to control harmful food marketing.

We do not object to consultations with companies. We are, however, concerned with initiatives that could allow corporations to fund, guide, shape and identify WHO policies and priorities. The WHO must be able to defend the case for public health – regardless of the impact it might have on company profits - as it did recently during an EU Parliament debate health claims.

Finally, we strongly urge that the critically important role of marketing controls and the protection of breastfeeding and optimal complementary feeding is recognized as an integral component of WHO's NCD strategy.

Thank you .