

Second International Conference on Nutrition

19 November 2014

General Debate

CHECK AGAINST
DELIVERY

**Statement by Ms Jaana Husu-Kallio, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
Head of the Delegation of Finland**

Mr/Ms Chairperson, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to speak on behalf of Finland. As a member of the European Union, Finland fully agrees with the statement delivered earlier by the Italian Minister on behalf of the European Union and its Member States.

I would like to thank FAO and WHO and all the members for making this Conference happen. Nutrition is an issue of utmost importance, which needs to be properly addressed at all levels.

Nutrition is an integral element of food policy

Food and nutrition policy contributes to the prosperity of a nation by enhancing the health of its people. Integrating the different policy areas and actors to support food and nutrition security in the best way possible is the task of the policy-makers, the governments. We need to incorporate health aspects in all of our policies.

We have to make sure that everyone has access to a diet that is affordable, tasty, balanced, healthy and sustainable. In Finland, for example, proper, hot school meals have been served free of charge to all children for more than 60 years (since 1948). We have had health education including nutrition issues and cooking skills as a compulsory part of the school curriculum for over 40 years (since 1973). This has been an investment in the future, not just for health! International evaluations show that the accomplishments of the Finnish students are among the best in the world. It is easier to learn when you eat well.

In Finland the decisions on food policy are based on scientific knowledge, and we make sure to keep up with the progress science. This close follow-up provides information on the success stories and guidance on how to further fine-tune the processes. The rationale for increasing the selenium content in

Finnish food arose from better awareness of the link between low selenium intake and cardiovascular problems. A balanced distribution of a sufficient amount of dietary selenium to support the health of the population was achieved by means of selenium fortification in fertilizers. Now, after 30 years (started in 1984), we continue to follow the selenium levels in the environment as well as in the population.

The growing global trade and marketing of unhealthy products are a challenge. We need to protect the vulnerable and seek synergies to reduce exposure to bad options, i.e. foods high in salt, sugar, saturated fat and trans fat. In Finland we have been working for decades to improve the nutritional quality of diets with different approaches, such as reformulation to reduce the levels of salt, saturated fat, sugar and energy in foods. National recommendations have been successful in guiding product development, and we now have wide range of healthier options on the market, such as low-fat dairy products and foods with less salt. Reducing salt intake continues to be an important national priority. We have warning labels on highly salted products to guide consumer decisions and to encourage the industry to develop better products.

The future holds important further challenges: we need to address the coexistence of over- and under-eating, while respecting the consumer's right to choose. We also need to further improve the sustainability of the food system. Waste management, especially food waste reduction, is a key to a sustainable food system.

Consumers need simple tools to be able to make healthy and ecological choices. The role of the politicians is crucial to make sure that real choices can be made in all socioeconomic population groups. The commitment of the private sector is also crucial, but public health must be protected from any undue influence or conflicts of interest.

Finland is ready to go on with the work towards fulfilling the target to provide everyone with a tasty, balanced, healthy and affordable diet. Such a diet must be produced in a sustainable way, also taking advantage of the local strengths.

I thank you for your attention and encourage all the members to continue the work on integrating nutrition and health into all policies.