Provisional Agenda item 8.1: Accelerating progress on prevention and control of NCDs including oral health and integrated eye care in the WHO South-East Asia Region

World Obesity Federation and its Members commend WHO and its Member States in the South-East Asia region for their leadership to accelerate progress on the prevention and control of NCDs. While the region has some of the lowest prevalence of overweight and obesity globally, trends have been and continue to rise at an alarming rate: only one country [out of 10] appears to be on track to achieve the 2025 NCD target set in the Regional Action Plan.

Obesity is a chronic disease that independently increases mortality rates and is a major risk factor for the three NCDs responsible for the majority of premature deaths worldwide - cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and cancer. World Obesity's latest report highlighted the correlation between COVID-19 deaths rates and obesity, with evidence showing that death rates are ten times higher in countries where over 50% of the population is overweight.

Overweight and obesity is now fastest rising in emerging economies, many of which are experiencing a double burden of malnutrition. Indonesia, Maldives, Timor-Leste, Thailand, Bhutan, Myanmar, Bangladesh and Nepal all appear in the top 10 list of countries with the most rapid rise in adult obesity prevalence, leading to a steep increase in other comorbidities with 13.1 deaths/1000 cases of diabetes recorded in the region. World Obesity’s Global Atlas on Childhood Obesity predicts that by 2030, five countries in South-East Asia will have over 1 million school-age children and youth living with obesity, whilst also recording the second highest prevalence and number of infants under 5 years with stunting (32% or 55.5m in 2018).

As more than two-thirds of all deaths in the region are from NCDs – half of which occur between the ages of 30 and 70 years – and given the undeniable link between obesity and outcomes in case of illness from COVID-19, it is vital that we focus on improving the health and reducing the vulnerability of people living with, affected by, or at risk of developing obesity, while working to reduce the double burden of malnutrition. We urge all Member States:

- To ensure NCD patients have continued access to routine obesity treatment and management services during COVID-19
- To integrate actions to address malnutrition in all its forms across health, food, transport, water and sanitation, education, and economic systems
- To ensure that people living with obesity are consulted throughout the development of guidance and policies affecting their care, both in COVID-19 recovery plans and in advancing the global NCD agenda.
- To include the prevention, management and treatment of obesity as a priority in UHC efforts and as a vital pathway to meet other relevant SDG targets, including SDG 3.4 on the reduction of premature mortality from NCDs

World Obesity welcomes the request to extend the Regional NCD Action Plan to 2030. As the COVID-19 pandemic threatens to slow down progress and reverse the gains made up-to-date, Member States should prioritise the implementation of nutrition and other public health policies in their recovery plans.