

GENEVA – The UN Special Rapporteur on the right to health, Anand Grover, on Wednesday blamed 'junk food' for the global obesity epidemic and urged the international community to deal with the alarming increase in deaths from diet-related diseases.

Presenting his final report\* to the Human Rights Council, Special Rapporteur Grover warned about disturbing figures, according to which 2.1 billion people in the world are overweight or obese, and at least 2.8 million die every year because of their weight.

"The culprit is 'junk food'," Grover said. "Containing high levels of sugar, salt, trans-fats and saturated fats, this 'junk' has unfortunately replaced healthy foods in our diets."

Primarily responsible for the burgeoning rates of obesity and non-communicable diseases across the world, "'junk food' is not a simple public health issue or a medical concern, it poses a serious challenge to our lives, our health and our rights," the Special Rapporteur added.

According to the UN expert, policies of globalization, market consolidation by transnational companies and supermarket chains, skewed foreign direct investment, aggressive advertising of ultra-processed foods and changes in our lifestyles have driven the social transition to unhealthy diets.

To reverse the obesity epidemic, Grover urged States to implement their human rights obligations, not only by providing nutritious food but also by instituting measures to reduce the burden of diseases linked to 'junk food.'

In particular, the Special Rapporteur recommended that States formulate multi-sectoral policies with a view to:

- 1) promoting the availability and accessibility of healthy and nutritious foods;
- 2) developing food and nutrition guidelines for healthy diets;
- 3) ensuring that accurate information related to healthy diets is made available, thus allowing consumers to make informed choices;
- 4) increasing awareness about healthier food options;
- 5) regulating marketing and advertising of 'junk food';
- 6) adopting consumer-friendly labelling of food products; and
- 7) establishing accountability mechanisms for violations of the right to health.

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The human rights expert also underlined “the key role of the food industry in addressing the deleterious trend of unhealthy foods” and urged the industry to refrain from activities undermining people’s right to health.

Where legislation is in place to discourage unhealthy foods and promote healthier options, Grover urged food and beverage companies to comply with such laws and stop any activity undermining them.

(\*) Read the Special Rapporteur’s report on unhealthy foods and non-communicable diseases: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Health/Pages/AnnualReports.aspx>

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The Special Rapporteur on the right to health, Anand Grover, is an independent expert appointed by the UN Human Rights Council to help States, and others, promote and protect the right to the highest attainable standard of health (right to health). Mr. Grover (India) is co-founder and Director of the Lawyers Collective HIV/AIDS Unit and the Senior Counsel in India. Learn more, log on to: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Health/Pages/SRRightHealthIndex.aspx>

For more information and press inquiries, please contact Jamshid Gaziyeu (+41 22 917 91 83) or write to [srhealth@ohchr.org](mailto:srhealth@ohchr.org)

For media inquiries related to other UN independent experts:  
Xabier Celaya, UN Human Rights – Media Unit (+ 41 22 917 9383 / [xcelaya@ohchr.org](mailto:xcelaya@ohchr.org))

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