**Elimination of trans fats from food supply can reduce risk of heart disease**

**Islamabad, 11th November 2020**: Speakers at an advocacy seminar called for urgent steps to eliminate trans fatty acids from the food supply in Pakistan in order to reduce the incidence of heart disease and reduce mortality risk from infectious diseases like COVID-19. The event was jointly co-hosted by the Ministry of National Health Services Regulation and Coordination, World Health Organization and public health think tank Heartfile to discuss regulatory actions and finalize a National Action Plan to reduce trans fatty acid (TFA) in the Pakistani diet. The event was chaired by Special Advisor to Prime Minister (SAPM) social protection Dr. Sania Nishtar, and included participation from Parliamentary secretary for Health Dr. Nousheen Hamid, Director General Health Dr. Muhammad Safi, Director Nutrition Dr. Baseer Achakzai, WHO-EMRO Regional Director Dr. Ayoub Al-Jawaldeh as well as WHO Country Representative for Pakistan Dr. Mahipala Palitha. Representatives from provincial food authorities, provincial health departments, producers, civil society and academia also attended the meeting.

Opening the proceedings, Dr. Achakzai of MoNHSR&C said that TFA elimination was a priority area for the government and a simple way to reduce NCD prevalence in th country. He highlighted the efforts of Nutrition Wing of the Ministry which are being undertaken for the last two years in collaboration with WHO, Heartfile, GAIN and other development partners, academia aad researcn institutions.

Joining the meeting virtually, Dr. Ayoub Al Jawaldeh, Regional Director Nutrition, WHO EMRO office appreciated the work of Pakistan for elimination of Trans fats in the food supply. He gave the overview of NCDs in the region and work done in other countries to target TFAs in locally produced and imported food products. He said that it was critical that industry begin to develop capacities for replacing trans fat in their production processes.

Addressing the gathering, WHO Country Representative Dr. Mahipala Palitha appreciated the efforts of Ministry of Health for its work to assess TFA levels in Pakistan and prepare a plan for its elimination. He cited the examples of other countries around the world, from Denmark to Canada, Argentina and Iran, to explain what practices around the world had been successful in eliminating TFAs from the food supply. He stressed the importance of multi-stakeholder collaboration between public health officials, regulators, civil society and the private sector to eliminate TFA by 2023.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr. Nousheen Hamid Prliamentary Secretary for MoNHSR&C said that non-communicable diseases (NCDs) were becoming a major cause of mortality and morbidity in the developing world including Pakistan. She said that industrially produced trans fatty acids (TFA) are a major contributor to obesity and cardiovascular disease, accounting for between 260,000 to 500,000 deaths per year. She said Pakistan’s trans-fat intake is estimated to be the 2nd highest in the WHO-EMRO region after Egypt, at nearly 6% of daily energy intake whereas the WHO recommends limiting TFA intake to less than 1% of energy per day. She expressed the hope that the collaborative efforts of the government, WHO, provincial authorities and civil society would result in effective action for eliminating trans fats and improving public health.

Addressing the meeting, SAPM on Social Protection Dr Sania Nishtar said that NCDs were the main health challenge facing Pakistan and TFA was a major contributor to NCDs in the country. According to Dr. Nishtar, the removal of industrially produced TFA from the food supply was one of the most straightforward and low-cost public health interventions that could improve population health. She said after the recent decision of Council of Common Interests to harmonize food standards, it was now the responsibility of PSQCA in partnership with Ministry of Health and provincial food authorities to protect Pakistani consumers and enact regulations in line with internationally acceptable best practices and WHO recommendations, which included establishing limits on TFA of less than 2g per 100g of fat in all food items.

The event also included the screening of a documentary on trans fats developed by Heartfile. Ammar Rashid of Heartfile presented the National Action Plan on TFA elimination prepared collaboratively with MoNHSR&C and WHO Pakistan. The plan was focused on four objectives, enacting and implementing regulatory actions to eliminate industrially-produced trans-fats in Pakistan, enforcing compliance with TFA policies and regulations, creating awareness of the negative health impact of TFA among policy-makers, suppliers, and the public and promoting the replacement of industrially-produced trans-fats with healthier fats and oils.

Concluding the proceedings, Dr. Muhammad Safi, Director General Health said that the federal government fully supports efforts to eliminate TFA from the food supply and said that national level Health and Population Ministerial Council would be overseeing efforts to reduce NCDs including TFA, and other dietary risk factors like sugar and salt. Dr. Khawaja Masuood National Coordinator Nutriton moderated the proceedings and thanked participants for their participation. He said that under the patronage of Minister for Health, Minister for Poverty Alleviation and Parliamentary Secretary for Health and support of all the stakeholders, we would be able to achieve the target of TFA Elimination in Processed Food in Pakistan.