

THE LANCET DENOUNCES

THE GLOBAL RACE OF THE FOOD INDUSTRY FOR PROFIT

Denounced by THE LANCET after **three years of investigation**, the food industry's not-so-great underbelly.

Reported by Frédéric Soumois in the Belgian newspaper Le Soir, The Lancet denounces the race for profit, at the cost of the health of millions of people, who die from eating too much or too little.

The figure speaks for itself: two thousand billion per year. Four million deaths per year.

It is a 60-page, highly documented analysis, involving 43 experts from 14 countries, which names the major agri-food multinationals.

They plunder the earth for profit, feeding half the world very poorly, while leaving nearly three billion people malnourished or starving.

These unimaginable and scandalous figures are true, and unacceptable.

These experts identify this global epidemic as the greatest threat to global human health. They add: "Over the past two decades, despite growth, undernutrition has been declining too slowly to meet global targets, no country has reversed its obesity epidemic, and global policy measures to counter the threat of climate change have barely begun. Obese people die prematurely from cardiovascular disease, gastrointestinal cancer and diabetes.

Some figures: 815 million human beings suffer from hunger. 2 billion are victims of malnutrition. Lack of dietary diversity, absence of essential micronutrients, deficiencies in iron, iodine, vitamins A or C. In Africa and Asia, the estimated economic losses vary between 4 and 11% of GDP. As for climate change, it will have considerable economic consequences in the coming years, varying from 5 to 10% of GDP, according to Olivier de Schutter, professor at the UCL in Louvain and one of the 43 experts who co-authored the report.

"Obesity, malnutrition and climate change are interrelated. They are ultimately only the visible consequences, or symptoms, of certain societal choices. In medical terminology, a syndemic is a set of interrelated health problems that affect the individual, and that are mutually reinforcing; the term refers to major challenges that our societies face, but that can be traced back to common causes and that are therefore more effectively addressed together.

"Our diets are deeply formatted by a food environment which, particularly through the advertising that targets us, puts the increase in profits of the food industry above the health of the population: the marketing of

The most outrageous aspect of this is the fact that we have to take urgent action to mitigate climate change. The measures we urgently need to take to mitigate climate disruption are being delayed or even stopped by economic actors who see it as a threat to their competitiveness and continue to put profit maximisation ahead of the interests of future generations. Olivier De Schutter argues.

Copied from the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco, a Framework Convention on Food Systems (FCFS) would explicitly exclude the food industry from policy-making.

"While food clearly differs from tobacco in its necessity to sustain human life, unhealthy food and drink do not. The similarities with Big Tobacco lie in the damage they cause and the behaviour of the societies that benefit from them. A framework convention on food systems would help individual countries defend themselves against commercial interests, redirect the vast subsidies that currently benefit unhealthy industries and provide full transparency. Explains Professor William H. Dietz (George Washington University)

While Lord Eastleigh, President of the International Diplomatic Consultative Commission, I.D.C.C. (London) advocates legislation to ban European lobbies, and the banning of food advertisements in cinema and television, as well as the removal of vending machines for sweets and soft drinks from schools and universities.

"The \$5 trillion currently spent on fossil fuels and large-scale global agriculture should be reallocated to sustainable, healthy and environmentally friendly activities. In addition, a \$1 billion global fund should be created to help civil society advocate for change to break through decades of policy inertia," the experts say.

"Enabling policy-makers to work free from the influence of lobbies, improving the transparency and accountability of public action, and promoting mechanisms of participatory democracy are all ways of making progress on health, the environment and social justice," explains Olivier de Schutter.

It is certain that, as usual, there will be fierce opposition from business interests, a lack of political leadership, and insufficient social demand for change, preventing action on the global picture, with rising rates of obesity, greenhouse gas emissions and stagnant rates of undernutrition.

"The coexistence of obesity and stunting in the same children in some countries is an urgent warning sign - and both will be exacerbated by the climate change," says Dr Richard Horton, Editor-in-Chief of The Lancet .