

## Closing Remarks – WHA78 LSFF Side Event

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Today, we witnessed a powerful confluence of science, leadership, and commitment. I want to begin by sincerely thanking our distinguished speakers, including the honorable representatives from Bangladesh, Egypt, Kenya, Oman, Pakistan, and the Philippines, as well as our insightful panelists from diverse organizations and countries. My gratitude also extends to our dedicated co-hosts: UNICEF, GAIN, the Micronutrient Forum, the G4 Alliance, Helen Keller International, the Iodine Global Network, the World Food Programme, GAPSBiF, the International Federation for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus, and the Food Fortification Initiative. From all the interventions today, three key messages resonate clearly:

1. The evidence is overwhelming: Large-scale food fortification (LSFF) saves lives, prevents disabilities, and builds resilience.
2. The opportunity is within reach: Full implementation of WHA Resolution 76.19 could prevent 200,000 neural tube defect cases globally each year, and more than 60,000 pregnancy terminations attributable to micronutrient deficiencies. This is in addition to the countless instances of preventable micronutrient deficiencies affecting the broader population.
3. The momentum is real: The national experiences shared today prove that LSFF is both achievable and impactful at scale. We are not starting from scratch—we are building on a solid and inclusive foundation.

However, for LSFF to truly succeed, it demands political will, sustainable investment, and long-term commitment, especially in implementation, scaling up, monitoring, and surveillance. As we look ahead to the first progress report to the WHO Secretariat in the coming year, I would like to briefly share findings from a cross-sectional study we conducted at the University of La Sabana in Colombia. We analyzed the regulatory status of food fortification across all 194 WHO Member States, triangulating reliable sources such as the Global Fortification Data Exchange, FFI, FAO, and official national reports. Then, we used a validated scale to classify the need for regulatory change as: urgent, high, medium, or unnecessary.

Here's what we found:

- 37.24% of countries urgently require legislative modifications for mandatory folic acid fortification.
- 60.2% require a high level of policy change.
- Only 1.02% have comprehensive regulations covering all evaluated staple foods.
- Asia and Africa showed the greatest need for reform, followed by Europe, while the Americas displayed significant compliance—though with clear room for improvement.

These findings underscore that while progress has been made, much remains to be done. Let me leave you with three unmissable takeaways:

1. Urgency: Two billion people still suffer from micronutrient deficiencies. This is unacceptable—and, more importantly, preventable.
2. Equity: Food fortification is among the most cost-effective, safe, and equitable public health interventions available.
3. Opportunity: The WHA resolution is more than a policy—it is a platform to mobilize global political will.

The resolution opens the door to stronger accountability, smarter investments, and more effective coordination. The time to act is now. We must:

- Support governments in implementing LSFF policies.
- Leverage global partnerships to scale innovation.
- Ensure that communities are engaged and fully benefit from these policies.

So, here is our call to the world: Let us speak with one voice:

Fortification is a moral imperative and a smart investment. Together, we can (and we must) end hidden hunger.

Thank you.