

**OPEN LETTER TO CANADIAN AND MEXICAN AUTHORITIES  
ON THE PROTECTION OF FRONT-OF-PACK NUTRITION LABELING**

Ottawa and Mexico City  
April 18, 2018

**The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau**  
**P.C., M.P.**  
Prime Minister of Canada

**Enrique Peña Nieto**  
President of Mexico

**The Honourable Chrystia Freeland, P.C., M.P.**  
Minister of Foreign Affairs of Canada

**Luis Videgaray Caso**  
Secretary of Foreign Affairs of Mexico

**Mr. Steve Verheul**  
Canada's Chief NAFTA Negotiator

**Kenneth Smith Ramos**  
Mexico's Technical Head Chief Negotiator  
for NAFTA

**CC: The Honourable Ginette Petitpas Taylor,**  
**P.C., M.P.**  
Minister of Health of Canada

**CC: José Narro Robles**  
Secretary of Health of Mexico

Dear Sirs and Madams:

The undersigned organizations and academic experts write **to strongly object to the misuse of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) negotiations in a way that could threaten public health.**

We are gravely concerned with a proposal put forward by the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) that we believe will undermine mandatory front-of-pack (FOP) nutrition labeling initiatives being undertaken in North America. This could set a bad precedent and impact other FOP proposals around the world. We are concerned that this proposal will subvert our countries' sovereign rights to protect the health of our citizens.

The World Health Organization reports that the global prevalence of obesity nearly tripled between 1975 and 2016. Canada, the United States, and Mexico all have overweight/obesity rates that are well over the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average, affecting quality of life; increasing risk for diabetes, cancer, heart disease and other diet-related conditions; and contributing to rising health care costs.

One of the key causes of obesity and related chronic diseases is the excess consumption of ultra-processed foods and beverages, which is a growing trend that our countries share. **The use of mandatory FOP labels that inform consumers if a food or beverage product is unhealthy, because it contains high amounts of sugar, saturated fats and/or salt, is a critical measure to combat the epidemic of diet-related diseases.**

The U.S. proposal is not only an abuse of trade agreement mechanisms but runs counter to World Health Organization obesity prevention recommendations, which call for mandatory, easy to

understand, interpretive FOP labels based on the best available evidence. Chile and Ecuador have already implemented such interpretive labels, which use symbols and colors to inform consumers, and they have proven effective. The Chilean label is recognized by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and other institutions, as a valuable example to follow.

A FOP label based on these international recommendations is currently being developed in Canada and is also under consideration in Mexico. **The NAFTA proposal from the U.S. would directly subvert Canada's current efforts, as well as any future initiatives in Mexico and the U.S., to develop a FOP label that is culturally and socially appropriate for its citizens.** Industry special interests have a long history of using this type of treaty provision to delay or impede life-saving public health interventions; NAFTA is no place to limit any country's health policy choices, nor to set health policy in general.

The voluntary Guideline Daily Amounts promoted by the U.S. NAFTA proposal, as well as by the food industry in Mexico, Canada, the U.S. and globally, are ineffective, not clearly understood by consumers and utilize high criteria content levels for sugar that represent a risk to health according to PAHO.

**We urge you to oppose the U.S. proposal and any language or measure in NAFTA that would restrict participating countries' ability to implement mandatory FOP labels on food and beverages and protect public health.** The right to life and health of our citizens, and the best interests of children, as recognized by the United Nations and our constitutions, should reign supreme over any economic or corporate interest. NAFTA should not impede the consumer's right to information nor restrict a country's autonomy to protect its citizens—especially children—from preventable disease and premature death.

Sincerely,

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