Achieving Zero Hunger is not only about addressing hunger, but also nourishing people, while nurturing the planet. This year, World Food Day calls for action across sectors to make healthy and sustainable diets accessible and affordable to everyone. At the same time, it calls on everyone to start thinking about what we eat.

In recent decades, we have dramatically changed our diets and eating habits as a result of globalization, urbanization and income growth. We have moved from seasonal, mainly plant-based and fibre-rich dishes to high calorie diets, which are high in refined starches, sugar, fats, salt, processed foods, meat and other animal-source products. Less time is spent preparing meals at home, and consumers, especially in urban areas, increasingly rely on supermarkets, fast food outlets, street food vendors and take-away restaurants.

A combination of unhealthy diets and sedentary lifestyles has sent obesity rates soaring, not only in developed countries, but also low-income countries, where hunger and obesity often coexist. Now over 670 million adults and 120 million girls and boys (5-19 years) are obese, and over 40 million children under 5 are overweight, while over 800 million people suffer from hunger. An unhealthy diet is the leading risk factor for deaths from non-communicable diseases (NCDs), including cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and certain cancers. Linked with one fifth of deaths worldwide, unhealthy eating habits are also taking a toll on national health budgets costing up to USD 2 trillion per year.

In the way our food systems currently work, from agricultural production to processing and retailing, there is little space for fresh, locally produced foods as staple crops such as cereals take priority. Intensified food production, combined with climate change, is causing a rapid loss of biodiversity. Today only nine plant species account for 66% of total crop production despite the fact that throughout history, more than 6000 species have been cultivated for food. A diverse variety of crops is crucial for providing healthy diets and safeguarding the environment.

Obesity and other forms of malnutrition affect nearly one in three people. Projections indicate that the number will be one in two by 2025. The good news is that affordable solutions exist to reduce all forms of malnutrition, but they require greater global commitment and action.

The event in New York will bring together Member States, the UN system, civil society and other partners to discuss these important issues and to promote worldwide awareness and action for those who suffer from hunger and for the need to ensure healthy diets for all.