We, the undersigned, want to take this opportunity, on COP’s first “Health Day”, to publicly announce our commitment to evidence-based obesity prevention, treatment and management in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Our region has some of the highest rates of obesity in the world and if current trends continue, there are projected to be 64 million children and adolescents and 212 million adults living with obesity in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean region by 2035. We argue that we must join forces and act now so that all people living with obesity receive the support they need, and we all have the healthy environments we deserve.

Today, at COP28, conversations are underway on how to address shared issues related to climate, human health and our environments. As obesity, climate change and undernutrition share common societal drivers, and co-exist and interact with each other as a ‘Global Syndemic’, we take this “Health Day” as an opportunity to publicly commit to launching a Middle East and North African Association of Obesity in the spring of 2024, to represent the region’s needs at a global level and to foster learning and collaboration across countries. As healthcare professionals and advocates, we pledge to work together to take on our region’s challenges in earnest and to be world leaders in the implementation of obesity policies and practices championed by the World Health Organization in the 2022 WHO obesity recommendations and its accompanying Acceleration Plan.

As a collective, our organisations call for increased investment in obesity. The economic impact of overweight and obesity in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean region was estimated to be $70 billion US dollars in 2020 (equivalent to 2.3% of regional GDP) and those figures are only predicted to rise. In the UAE, where COP is being hosted this year, overweight and obesity were estimated to cost $12 billion in 2020 and are estimated to rise to $32 billion by 2035. Yet we know that investing in obesity prevention and treatment now will make a difference to lives today and in the future. Given the shared drivers of the obesity epidemic and the climate crisis, we call for COP28 to champion investment in health and obesity as part of climate mitigation and action.

It is this shared desire to have a region (MENA) where obesity prevention is invested in and obesity care and management are accessible and available to all, that serves as motivation for us all to combine efforts as an association. With the World Obesity Federation’s support, we will call for obesity training to be embedded in standard medical training and for obesity care to be included in universal health coverage efforts. We will push for the implementation of evidence-based prevention policies that make our homes, our places of work and our schools healthier environments and, finally, we will advocate for a region free of weight stigma. The Middle East and North African Association of Obesity will champion these causes, and hopes to be the driving force behind progress on obesity in the region in the coming years.

Signed,

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PUBLIC STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA OBESITY ASSOCIATION

Signatories