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“For the first time in human history, the number of overweight people rivals the number of underweight people,” states the World Watch Institute (WWI).

While the world's underfed population has declined slightly since 1980 to 1.1 billion, the number of overweight people has topped the billion mark, with at least 300 million of them obese. Even more alarming, overweight and obesity are advancing rapidly in the developing world. The World Health Organization (WHO) has coined the phrase “globesity” to describe the escalating global epidemic of overweight and obesity, which paradoxically coexists with undernutrition in many parts of the world.

The Spring/Summer 2004 issue of the Global Health and Environment Monitor heeds WWI and WHO's urgent call for action to prevent obesity and overweight around the globe, while continuing to combat undernutrition. In the lead article, Anna Ferro-Luzzi and Pekka Pushka outline obesity's increasing prevalence, its causes and consequences, and strategies for prevention. In a companion article, Boyd Swinburn focuses on children, underlining the adverse, synergistic effects of obesity and malnutrition on this vulnerable group.

Michael Jacobson traces the origins of obesity in the United States, while highlighting the pitfalls of national policies for obesity prevention and offering proactive actions to halt the epidemic in the Insider's View. In a complimentary feature, Dean Ornish compares his recommended low-fat and the Atkins low-carbohydrate diets, and offers an evidence-based, practical formula to weight reduction and maintenance.

CECHE News features CECH Vice Chairman Mark Palmer discussing universal democracy and observing that the world's most pressing health and environmental problems are disproportionately concentrated in dictatorships – topics covered in his recent book, “Breaking the Real Axis of Evil.” Also included in this section is Phyllis Magrab's update on Communities Can International (CCI), a joint project of the Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development and CECH; in her article, she relates CCI and UNESCO's efforts to ensure education for all children by 2015.

An apt conclusion to this issue is Philip James' policy piece, a pithy analysis of national and universal approaches, especially WHO's newly proposed global strategy, for combating the obesity epidemic. WHO's recommendations, implementation of which would necessitate certain long-overdue changes in food, sugar and soft-drink industry practices, are opposed by fast-food industry lobbyists and the U.S. secretary for Health and Human Services, giving James' “toxic environment” label both poignancy and power.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sushma Palmer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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