

WOMEN *4th World Conference Beijing China Sept. '95*

The United Nations has held three major world conferences on women in different continents, starting in 1975 in Mexico, followed by Copenhagen in 1980 and Nairobi in 1985. The Fourth World Conference on Women will be held in Beijing, China, 4-15 September 1995.

The goal of the Conference is to establish a programme of strategic action to eliminate inequalities between men and women. The theme of the Conference is *Action for Equality, Development and Peace*. It aims at setting guidelines for Member States of the United Nations to adopt policies and actions to remove gender inequalities.

The practical outcome of the Conference will be the adoption, by Member States, of a series of United Nations recommendations for the coming decade. Many organisations will follow up on the activities undertaken in Member States to implement such recommendations.

During the World Conference in Beijing, there will be a parallel NGO Forum on Women, Aug. 30 - Sept. 8, at which women from all walks of life will bring forward their specific issues of concern, such as reproductive rights, violence against women, women's work and women's health.

WABA IN BEIJING

WABA and its member organisations will participate in the Conference and the NGO Forum and will speak about the importance of breastfeeding as a means of empowering women. A mime theatre, workshop and booths on breastfeeding and women's issues will be organised. At the final Preparatory Committee meeting in New York, March '95, WABA member organisations worked hard to ensure that the final document for the Conference integrated language to protect, promote and support breastfeeding. This has been a challenge which will continue up to Beijing.

You too can act . . .

- Contact your national women's organisations and your Ministry of Women's Affairs or Office on the Status of Women to convince them of the importance of recognising breastfeeding as a women's issue and incorporate it within their programme of action.
- Lobby your governments so that breastfeeding is recognised as a woman's right at Beijing and beyond.
- Monitor government actions to ensure that past and future recommendations adopted are fully implemented to support and protect breastfeeding.



Breastfeeding and Reproductive Rights

Breastfeeding has been given global recognition for its contribution to child survival at international conferences and in international documents.

Less attention, however, is given to its significant role in empowering women. Breastfeeding empowers a woman by allowing her to control her own fertility and enhance her health as well as that of her children. The knowledge that a breastfeeding mother is less likely to become pregnant is part of the traditional wisdom of many cultures. *Breastfeeding is a woman's reproductive right which should be protected, supported and promoted.*

Current research confirms that as long as a woman is fully or nearly fully breastfeeding, and has not resumed menstruation, she has a less than 2% risk of becoming pregnant. Family planners know this method as Lactational Amenorrhea Method (LAM). In areas of the world where artificial contraception is unaffordable, unavailable or unacceptable, breastfeeding provides a woman with an effective means of family planning. A decline in breastfeeding rates contributes to the increase in birthrate where artificial means of family planning are not used.

Breastfeeding allows a woman to space births effectively, according to her own fertility, independently of any possible forces within her society which would hinder her right to control her own fertility.