



**T**he World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) has chosen the theme "Breastfeeding: Nature's Way" for World Breastfeeding Week (WBW) 1997 :

- \* to celebrate women's capacity to sustain life;
- \* to cherish the life-giving benefits of breastmilk; and
- \* to recognize breastfeeding as the most ecological food system.

WBW 97 aims to raise public awareness of the environmental benefits of breastfeeding and show the ecologically damaging effects of bottle feeding. It also calls for cooperation with environmental groups to ensure that governments and communities worldwide support ecologically sound practices.

There are many positive reasons for women to breastfeed their babies: breastmilk is the best and most nutritious food, protecting them from illness and ensuring their healthy physical and psychological development.

*As trees turn to the sun, babies turn to their mother's breast. Such is nature's way...*

For mothers, breastfeeding provides such health benefits as reducing the risk of breast and ovarian cancer, reducing post-partum bleeding and iron deficiency anemia, and is a natural means of spacing children by delaying ovulation.

Breastfeeding also empowers women by increasing their self-confidence in their capacity to nourish and protect as well as nurture their babies and by decreasing their dependence on commercial products.

Breastfeeding benefits all sectors of society economically, ecologically and socially. However, over the last decades, women's self confidence in their capacity to nourish their infants has been undermined by many factors, including the aggressive marketing tactics of the artificial baby milk or infant formula industry and a lack of social support.

Millions of babies fall ill every year because they are not breastfed. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that more than 1.5 million infant deaths could be avoided every year if all babies were breastfed.

It is vital to increase our efforts to support, protect and promote breastfeeding. All sectors of society need to learn about the advantages of breastfeeding and how they can each in their own way support mothers to breastfeed.

All women should have access to information and support in order to make truly informed choices about these natural rights.

Let us use the occasion of World Breastfeeding Week 1997 to work with our partners from around the world to restore a breastfeeding culture - a culture that respects mother earth, appreciates humanity's gift of life and adheres to nature's way.



*The breastfeeding culture is a culture of peace, balance and harmony. It involves trusteeship and global responsibility towards our young, and seeks accountability from governments and various spiritual traditions to support families in nurturing children.*

*Almost all great world religions recognize breastfeeding as essential for nurturing the young, and respect women's role in doing so.*