

PRESS RELEASE



Babies cannot wait.

www.worldbreastfeedingweek.org

There are a hundred and one ways in which companies persuade mothers to use commercial products to feed their infants rather than the natural way through breastfeeding. Millions of infant lives could be saved if marketing companies followed the rules. This year's World Breastfeeding Week (1 – 7 August) will be looking at these rules, which apply to baby milk manufacturers in all countries.

World Breastfeeding Week (WBW) is celebrated each year in 120 countries worldwide focusing on a single theme. This year the theme is entitled ***Code Watch : 25 Years of Protecting Breastfeeding***, which focuses on the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes (The Code). This Code was adopted 25 years ago by the World Health Assembly to protect mothers and babies. It has been and continues to be one of the most hotly debated international recommendations ever.

“Companies spend millions of dollars promoting their products because it shows results, says Yeong Joo Kean, Legal Advisor of the International Code Documentation Centre (ICDC), “their sales would drop if they did not promote. But commercial promotion is in direct competition with breastfeeding and that is a bad thing”. Health authorities agree that breastfeeding is the single most effective intervention for infant health; it has been proven to provide optimal nutrition and protect against obesity, respiratory infections and diarrhoea; against allergies, skin disease and asthma. Moreover, studies show that bottle-fed babies are just not as smart as their breastfed counterparts.

The Code forbids promotional practices such as advertising, inaccurate labeling, the giving of samples, posters, calendars and gifts to mothers, nurses and doctors. Countries are expected to turn these rules into national legislation and other measures to protect mothers and babies from being bombarded with unethical marketing practices. More than 70 countries have done so but companies do not always comply with the rules. *“That is why WABA, the World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action, has decided to celebrate the Code’s 25th anniversary by issuing a call for action”, says Julianna Lim Abdullah, International Coordinator of WABA’s World Breastfeeding Week. “Governments must protect the health of their citizens, particularly babies, who are the most vulnerable.”*

When more people are aware that these rules exist, more of them will protest when companies violate the Code, more governments will be prompted to take action and fewer companies will dare to advertise their products. As a result, more mothers and babies will be protected. From 1 to 7 August this year, this message to protect breastfeeding will ring out in rich and poor communities alike, North and South in more than one hundred and twenty countries.

The Code does not forbid the sale of products, it only asks for a halt of product promotion so that families get objective information and can decide for the best.

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The World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) is a global network of individuals and organisations concerned with the protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding worldwide based on the Innocenti Declaration, the Ten Links for Nurturing the Future and the WHO/UNICEF Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding. Its core partners are International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN), La Leche League International (LLL), International Lactation Consultant Association (ILCA), Wellstart International, Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine (ABM) and LINKAGES. WABA is in consultative status with UNICEF and an NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC) • WABA, PO Box 1200, 10850 Penang, Malaysia • Tel: 60-4-6584 816 • Fax: 60-4-6572 655 • Email: waba@streamyx.com • Website: www.waba.org.my

After 25 years;

* Only 32 countries have enacted legislation which incorporates all or nearly all the provisions of the International Code and subsequent relevant resolutions - warm congratulations to them;

* A further 44 have laws which partially control the marketing of breastmilk substitutes; this category includes European Union Member States whose laws are not stringent enough;

* 18 countries have a voluntary code or a public health policy encompassing nearly all provisions of the Code but many lack enforcement mechanisms.¹

A recent study showed that companies spend an annual average of US\$30 per baby on promotion for their products while the government just spends 21 cents per baby on promoting breastfeeding, clear proof of how the scales are tipped the wrong way. Breastfeeding should not have to compete, babies cannot wait another 25 years for companies to comply with the Code; only immediate enforced legislation based on all the provisions of the Code can give breastfeeding a fair chance. To protect the future generations of countries worldwide, action must be taken now.

¹ These figures appear in "The State of the Code by Country 2006", a chart on Code implementation by ICDC. The chart can be downloaded from www.ibfan.org

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About ICDC

International Code Documentation Centre (ICDC), was set up in 1985 to keep track of Code implementation worldwide. ICDC publishes the State of the Code by Country and The State of the Code by Company every two to three years. Since 1991, ICDC has been giving training courses on Code implementation to assist governments in drafting appropriate legislation and other measures to protect breastfeeding. ICDC collects, analyses and evaluates national laws and draft laws. ICDC conducts Code monitoring courses and maintains a database on Code violations worldwide. It also acts as the WABA Code Compliance Taskforce.

About WABA

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