

## 59<sup>th</sup> Session of the World Health Assembly

Agenda item 11.8

Chairperson, honourable delegates,

My name is Annelies Allain, Director of the International Code Documentation Centre of IBFAN. We appreciate the opportunity to speak on this important issue on behalf of Consumers International.

Twenty-five years after the adoption of the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes, it is time to take stock of where the world is now in protecting babies' first food.

We carefully track Code implementation worldwide and monitor marketing practices of baby food companies for Code compliance. Our records show that:

- 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 EU Member States who will be downgraded if the new Commission proposals are adopted.
- 18 countries have a voluntary code or a public health policy encompassing nearly all provisions of the Code but lack any enforcement mechanisms.

These figures appear in the anniversary report: the ***State of the Code by Country, 2006***, published by ICDC, a specialist office of IBFAN. (*copies are available upon request*)

For over 15 years, ICDC has trained government officials from 135 countries in Code implementation and it is gratifying to see some of our quiet work acknowledged in the Secretariat's quadrennial Report. We shall continue to give support to the 22 countries with draft legislation and to others who wish to strengthen existing laws.

While Code implementation by governments is relatively good, enforcement is often lacking. We must not be complacent because, despite the Code, the annual turnover of the baby food market has in fact grown from some US\$8 billion in 1981 to an estimated US\$ 20 billion now. Companies pay lip-service to the Code and are forever inventing clever new ways to win customers by spending millions on promotion.

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; only enforced legislation based on the provisions of the Code can give breastfeeding a fair chance.

Finally, Mr Chairman, (just as there are benefits to breastfeeding,) there are measurable risks of not breastfeeding. which must be highlighted. Even the World Bank says that “**adequate breastfeeding and complementary feeding could prevent more than twice as many deaths of children under age five as any other intervention**”.

Last November, UNICEF said **six million lives are saved every year by improved breastfeeding**. This must be recognized as a major contribution to MDG-4. And breastfeeding also protects against obesity. If we don't manage a real breakthrough, future generations in many countries will end up with American levels of child obesity.

Many stakeholders have been hoping that the Code and the breastfeeding campaign will go away ... Personally, dear delegates, I do not hope to be working on Code training and monitoring over the next 25 years... BUT we will be training a new generation of advocates to continue this, just in case.