

Press Release - June 3, 2002

**55th WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY REMOVES COMMERCIAL
INFLUENCE FROM INFANT FEEDING PROGRAMMES**

Dr. Arun Gupta, BPNI National Coordinator and South Asia Representative, International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN) attended the WHA meeting as a member of the IBFAN team to advocate for strong resolutions on Infant & Young Child Feeding agenda item 13.10 at the 55th World Health Assembly meeting.

After a thorough debate on the draft resolution EB 18 as forward by the Executive Board to the Assembly on Infant and Young Child Feeding and a 3-hour drafting session, a NEW strengthened Resolution on Infant and Young Child Nutrition (WHA 55.25) was adopted at the World Health Assembly in Geneva on Saturday 18th May 2002.

38 countries spoke in the debate, the large majority of speakers from the developing world calling for the draft text to be strengthened to ensure that the critical importance of exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months was mentioned and that infant feeding programmes do not involve the baby feeding industry (beyond the requirement to respect the International Code and subsequent relevant WHA Resolutions).

During the Assembly debate on the draft resolution notable interventions were made by several countries: The Indian delegation made the most critical comments and called for the removal of the term 'commercial' saying:

"Commercial enterprises by definition are profit driven entities. It is neither appropriate nor realistic for the WHO to expect that commercial groups will work along with governments and other groups to protect, promote and support breastfeeding."

India also drew attention to WHA Resolution 49.15 which in 1996 urged member states to ensure that monitoring is carried out in a transparent independent manner, free from commercial

influence and that financial support for professionals working in infant and young child health does not create conflict of interest.

These concerns were reinforced by a number of countries including Palau which appealed to WHO to "protect Member States from undue and unwanted influence by industries and manipulation by them".

The Resolution endorses a new Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding, the outcome of a four-year consultative process involving all member states. The Resolution sets aside the proposed partnership with commercial interests in implementing the strategy other than its role specified in the GS document para 44. To avoid conflicts of interests this intervention was made by the Indian government and supported by several delegates.

In addition to the intervention on the infant feeding debate, IBFAN and Consumers International made an intervention on the report on Diet, Nutrition and Physical Activity. IBFAN supported the opening address by the Director General Dr Gro Harlem Brundtland, in which she laid down a clear challenge to the trillion dollar food industry, referring to WHO's intention to "reinvigorate WHO's work on diet, food safety and human nutrition," and the problem of "excessive consumption of fatty, sugary and salty foods". Dr Brundtland said that:

"Getting loyalty to brand names is the key to influencing consumer behaviour - from the time children start to walk. Children currently influence 45% of household purchases in the US, and 65% in urban China.....Brand name promotions - whether for tobacco, alcohol or fast foods - are designed to take advantage of peoples subconscious..... There is certainly a need for guidance: in some cases, like tobacco advertising and alcohol advertising aimed at the young, what we need is control. WHO will play its part."

IBFAN warmly welcomed this new initiative but also expressed caution about the increasing trend towards Public Private Partnerships. These concerns were echoed by many NGOs, such as the People's Health Assembly, INFACT and Health Action International.

The 55th World Health Assembly adopted a new WHA resolution. The Resolution endorses a new Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding.

Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Nutrition

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The Breastfeeding Promotion Network of India (BPNI) is a national network of individuals and organisations working for protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding in India. BPNI believes that breastfeeding is the right of all mothers and children. BPNI works through advocacy, social mobilization, information sharing, education and training of health workers and monitoring the compliance of International Code/The IMS Act to protect breastfeeding. BPNI works as the Regional Focal Point for South Asia for the World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) & International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN). BPNI does not accept funds or sponsorship of any kind from the companies producing infant milk substitutes, feeding bottles, related equipments, or infant foods (cereal foods) or those have been ever found to violate the IMS Act or The International Code.