

23 May 2007

Dear Friends:

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is once again pleased to join the World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA), WHO and international NGO partners, and its affiliates in 120 countries in celebration of World Breastfeeding Week, 1-7 August 2007.

This year's theme, "Breastfeeding: the 1st hour, early initiation and exclusive breastfeeding can save more than ONE million babies" offers an excellent opportunity to draw global attention to the important role that breastfeeding plays in improving the health of infants.

Recently there has been some good news on rates of breastfeeding. An examination of 37 countries (covering some 60 per cent of the developing world population) has revealed an increase from 34 per cent to 41 per cent in the rates of exclusive breastfeeding in the first six months of children's lives. However some studies suggest an additional 1.3 million children would be saved if this rate were increased to 90 per cent, and that neonatal mortality is reduced by 22% when children are breastfed within an hour of birth.

The challenge we face is to find creative and convincing ways at the community level to encourage breastfeeding and to provide national authorities with solid evidence of the advantages of promoting breastfeeding at the national level.

World Breastfeeding Week also provides us with an opportunity to inform people of the benefits that early and exclusive breastfeeding provides to both families and nations. If we are successful, we will have saved lives thereby contributing to progress towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

UNICEF is committed to the protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding and we wish WABA and all our other partners much success in this important endeavour.

Yours sincerely,



Ann M. Veneman
Executive Director