

## **Elisabeth Sterken Statement for the WABA Nomination**

Food and nutrition have always been a deep passion of mine. But throughout my early schooling, it was the context of nutrition that always drew my attention. Subsequently as I studied nutritional sciences at university, the global realities of disparity – why some us are so well fed and others starve – became questions for which I sought answers. During my formative years the writings of Susan George, Frances Moore Lappé, Derrick Jelliffe and the many others they influenced, became my mainstays.

My first task as an international nutritionist was a position at the Ahmadu Bello University in northern Nigeria, as lecturer in nutrition in the department of pediatrics. My clinical role of setting up a treatment unit for malnourished children and their mothers, became the life-changing experience for my future. It was here that the results of power and economic disparity, and the injustices of greedy corporate behaviour, were characterised as 'Nestle syndrome' and 'baby-bottle disease'. It was here that mothers wrapped their dead babies in a cloth to carry them home, because even our rehydration unit could not save them. These mothers, who had believed in the corporate lies of healthy, robust babies, discovered too late that the tinned white powder could be deadly.

The birth of the International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN) in 1979 was the activist response to such outrageous greed. The words Dr. Cicely Williams spoke in 1939 from Singapore, Malaysia, '...misguided propaganda on infant feeding should be punished as the most criminal form of sedition, and those deaths should be regarded as murder' remain true today. For the past 25 years, as a nutritionist, specialising in infant and young child nutrition, I have worked as an advocate on behalf of mothers and children, always focused on the protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding.

It is a privilege to be working as a breastfeeding advocate and although there are many struggles and there is much hard work, the joy of working for change with a global community of committed friends and colleagues is incalculable. Working to advance the well-being and human rights of mothers and children is my commitment.

