

WABA Statement on Maternity Protection for International Labour Day, May 1, 2013

“Countries need to improve their national laws on maternity protection and should aim to ratify ILO Convention C183 for all working women!”



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Breastfeeding Action**

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The World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) reiterates its stand that all countries in the world should improve their legislation on maternity protection and ratify the most recent ILO convention on maternity protection for working women (C183, 2000) as a step towards addressing the problems that working mothers all over the world have to face during pregnancy, childbirth and the post-partum period.

WABA acknowledges the basic rights of all working women who seek to manage simultaneously their dual roles as mothers and workers. These rights include the right to work and to work in decent conditions without discrimination, the right to have children while working, the right to a healthy environment at the workplace and during the maternity period, the right to a decent standard of living, the right to breastfeed their child, including at work where appropriate.

The multitasking roles of working mothers are not properly acknowledged, respected or supported by society although international instruments and national laws do exist that provide and guarantee protection to working women. However, national laws are generally weak, they do not include all working women of reproductive age, nor are they fully implemented and the international instruments are far from being ratified.

During the period of reproduction¹ women are vulnerable and need special protection to meet their changing physical needs: ante- and post-natal medical visits, nutritious foods, breastfeeding counselling, rest periods, as well as specific health protection at the workplace, including during breastfeeding. During this same period, other measures are also needed: time off to give birth and rest before and afterwards, decent payment during these leave periods, assurance of same or equivalent employment upon return from maternity leave, a non-discriminatory attitude towards the employment of women of reproductive age, time off to breastfeed their child daily at the workplace.

The key maternity protection elements WABA and its member organisations (jointly, in the Maternity Protection Coalition²) have been defending since the 1990s are:

¹ The period of reproduction includes pregnancy, labour, delivery and breastfeeding.

² Maternity Protection Coalition (MPC): International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN), International Lactation Consultant Association (ILCA), La Leche League International (LLL), International Lactation Consultant Association (ILCA), Wellstart International and Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine (ABM). 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 is incorporated in Malaysia as World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action Bhd (847762-P), a non-profit company limited by guarantee.

- Legislation covering all working women, particularly those in the informal economy and those working in agriculture and as domestics;
- Paid leave of at least 18 weeks as recommended by the ILO with a period of compulsory leave of 6 weeks after birth – and if possible, of 4 weeks before birth. However, for optimal exclusive breastfeeding of 6 months, WABA calls for paid maternity leave of 24 weeks!
- Cash and medical benefits related to the whole maternity period to be provided by the State; financial benefits should meet the totality of the woman's income when at work;
- Health protection for the pregnant women, the mother and the baby at the workplace in case of dangerous or potentially dangerous work;
- Return to the same or equivalent job at the end of maternity leave with no loss of pay or of other benefits;
- No dismissal during the whole maternity period;
- No form of discrimination in/during employment of women, particularly during the reproductive age;
- Daily paid breastfeeding breaks of at least two 30-minutes periods (or shorter workdays);
- Breastfeeding facilities at the workplace;
- Family-/baby-/child-friendly policies at the workplace for work and family balance.

WABA hopes that the collective and continued struggle for improved conditions for working mothers will enable ALL women around the world to perform their productive and reproductive roles simultaneously and successfully, without having to choose between *mother's work and other work* ! WABA realises that this is a long struggle, an uphill battle, especially during this period of economic crisis. Countries and governments have to realise that working women are essential to their development - to the wealth of their economy and to the renewal of future healthy generations. And in order to manage fully, they are entitled to protective legislation that meets, at the least, the highest international standards.

For more information concerning the rights to maternity protection see the recently launched ILO Resource Package: *Maternity Protection Resource Package. From Aspiration to Reality for All.* <http://www.ilo.org/travail/lang--en/index.htm>

As well as the *Maternity Protection Coalition Maternity Protection Kit – A breastfeeding perspective* <http://www.waba.org.my/whatwedo/womenandwork/mpckit.htm>

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