



**World Alliance for
Breastfeeding Action**

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World Food Day

Press Release

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SAVING THE LIVES OF 1.3 MILLION BABIES A YEAR

Anwar Fazal, Chairperson Emeritus of the World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) states that “Today is World Food Day, and some 3500 babies will die because they were not breastfed. In fact, one child dies every 30 seconds.” He added that, “In one year, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) estimates that 1.3 million babies die each year because they were not exclusively breastfed. This is a tragedy that more governments must wake up to”.

Even as the right of children to adequate nutrition is outlined in the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, 20 million of the world’s youngest children are affected by severe acute malnutrition.¹

Most of this toll begins in infancy and could be largely prevented if mothers were provided with sufficient information and support to exclusively breastfeed their young babies and to continue partially breastfeeding their older babies and young children for a longer time.

Economic Value

There is also an economic benefit. Endorsement of the value of mother’s milk would save millions of dollars currently spent on the manufacture, transport and distribution of costly supplements and special foods to treat young child malnutrition.² “This will help countries to attain more self sufficiency and also food security” say Anwar Fazal.

Mother’s milk contains hundreds of known components, including live protective factors which confer active and passive immunity to diseases in the environment into which a baby is born.³ Breastmilk is a self-sustaining, renewable resource, produced in response to the baby’s appetite by every mother for her own baby, changing over time to meet his unique developmental needs, throughout the day to fit his individual diurnal rhythm, and even throughout each feed, to satisfy both hunger and thirst.

Exclusive Breastfeeding is Best

The World Health Organization recommends that all babies should be exclusively breastfed for the first 6 months, and should continue to breastfeed for up to 2 years or beyond while receiving appropriate complementary foods.⁴ Breastmilk provides 100% of a baby’s nutrition from birth to 6 months, up to 50% from 6 -12 months, up to 33% in the second year of life and 10% in the third year.⁵ Primary lactation failure is extremely rare. With sufficient information and support, almost all mothers are physically capable of making enough milk, yet 1.3 million babies die each year because they were not exclusively breastfed.⁶ This is because when babies younger than 6 months receive foods and liquids other than breastmilk, their risk of disease and malnutrition is increased in proportion to the displacement of human milk their diet. Artificial infant milks are usually manufactured from cow’s milk, which – while containing adequate ingredients to sustain life – do not contain the immunological components of breastmilk, and require high levels of hygiene to prevent life-threatening contamination.

Call for Action



Mothers' and babies' right to breastfeed places a legal obligation on governments to enact policy and legislation to make it possible for them to do so. If achievement of the UN Millenium Development Goals to eradicate hunger and to halve infant and young child mortality are to be translated into reality, then all sectors of society need to be mindful of their responsibility to mothers and babies. More needs to be done to protect, promote and support breastfeeding.

- Healthcare providers must provide up-to-date, evidence-based advice on optimal infant and young child feeding, and hospitals need to be Baby-Friendly.
- Mothers need accurate information and timely help to initiate and maintain breastfeeding. Recognition of the dual productive and reproductive roles of employed mothers should be translated into adequate paid maternity leave to enable them to breastfeed.
- Mothers in industrialized countries should be shielded from harrassment for breastfeeding in public.
- All mothers everywhere need to be protected from the inappropriate marketing strategies employed by the infant formula industry.

WABA calls for renewed political will from those national and international agencies, organizations and institutions who are in a position to make a difference, to ensure that infants' and young children's right to the right food is fulfilled.

For further information, please refer to "Breastfeeding and Food Security", <http://www.waba.org.my/activitysheet/acsh10.htm>

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Endnotes

- ¹ World Health Organization (WHO), the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Standing Committee on Nutrition (SCN) and UNICEF Statement, Innovative approach tackles malnutrition in the community, Geneva/New York/Rome, 7 June 2007. <http://www.wfp.org/english/?ModuleID=137&Key=2516>
- ² Hawn C, Problem No. 3, Hunger and malnutriton, Nutriset is attacking a huge problem with a surprisingly small product, Business 2.0 Magazine, 26 January 2007, http://money.cnn.com/2007/01/24/magazines/business2/Prob3_HungerMalnutrution.biz2/index.htm
- ³ Walker M, Breastfeeding Management for the clinician: using the evidence, Jones & Bartlett, 2006
- ⁴ WHO 2003(a). Global strategy for infant and young child feeding, Geneva: World Health Organization, 2003, <http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2003/9241562218.pdf>
- ⁵ WHO 2003. HIV and infant feeding: A guide for health-care managers and supervisors , World Health Organization 2003.
- ⁶ UNICEF Statement on World Breastfeeding Week, 23 May 2007