

# Press Release

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World Alliance for  
Breastfeeding Action

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## **Towards a Healthier World for Infants and Young Children: Celebrating the 5<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Global Strategy For Infant and Young Child Feeding**

Penang, 18 June, 2007 – Five years ago the world’s highest health policy setting body composed of health ministers from 192 member states – the World Health Assembly (WHA) – adopted a landmark resolution in support of the WHO/UNICEF the Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding (GSIYCF). It was and still is a comprehensive action plan aimed at improving and enhancing the nutritional status, development, growth, health and survival of infants and young children the world over, by ensuring that optimal feeding is a priority recognized and implemented by governments, international organizations and concerned parties.

According to Professor Miriam Labbok, MD, MPH currently WABA Steering Committee member, Director, Center for IYCF at UNC, and former UNICEF Senior Advisor on IYCF, research shows that enabling women to exclusively breastfeed for the first six months with continued breastfeeding for the first year would save an additional 1.3 million children’s lives every year. She adds that if breastfeeding is then continued with appropriate complementary feeding until at least age two, a total of 5,500 additional child deaths could be prevented every day of every year.

The Global Strategy identifies nine operational targets with the first four incorporated from the Innocenti Declaration. The targets are: (1) The appointment of a national breastfeeding coordinator of appropriate authority, and establishment of a multisectoral national breastfeeding committee; (2) Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding (the Baby-friendly Hospital Initiative) practiced in all maternity facilities; (3) Global implementation of the International Code of Marketing of Breast-Milk Substitutes and subsequent relevant World Health Assembly Resolutions in their entirety; (4) Enactment of imaginative legislation protecting the breastfeeding rights of working women; and establishment of means for enforcement of maternity protection. (5) Implementation of comprehensive government policies on infant and young child feeding; (6) Full support from health and other sectors for two years of breastfeeding or more; (7) Promotion of timely, adequate, safe and appropriate complementary feeding (addition of other foods while breastfeeding continues); (8) Guidance on infant and young child feeding in especially difficult circumstances, and related support for families and caregivers; and (9) Imaginative legislation or suitable measures giving effect to the International Code as part of the national comprehensive policy on infant and young child feeding.

The Global Strategy targets were reaffirmed at the “Innocenti +15” celebratory event in Florence, Italy in November 2005 organised by UNICEF and WHO in collaboration with international partner NGOs: The Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine, International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN), International Lactation Consultants Association (ILCA), La Leche League International, Regione Toscana, Linkages (USAID), Wellstart International and World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA). This meeting launched the new Innocenti Declaration 2005 on IYCF with all the 9 GSIYCF targets being emphasized with the understanding that we face increased global challenges and that we need to exert stronger influence in achieving our targets.

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After five years WABA calls for each of us concerned and involved in breastfeeding to pause, reflect and take stock of our achievements and shortcomings and develop a way forward. To make the Global Strategy a stronger document there are some aspects that we need to re-examine: (1) Although now accepted by the international health community, the GSIYCF did not highlight the vital importance of immediate postpartum skin-to-skin and breastfeeding within about 1 hour. WABA recognizing the need to advocate for initiating breastfeeding within the first hour has chosen it to be this year's theme for World Breastfeeding Week. Recent research on the importance of feeding within the first hour<sup>4</sup>, and the lives that could be saved by ensuring that hypothermia is prevented<sup>5</sup>, which can be accomplished by immediate skin to skin and early breastfeeding, serve as the catalysts for this choice. (2)The GSIYCF states that it is grounded on the best available scientific and epidemiological evidence but, for example, its approach and recommendations to HIV and Breastfeeding should be updated to reflect the consensus emanating from the October 2006 WHO Technical Consultation on PMTCT. (3) To infuse momentum the Global Strategy needs a focal timeline to meet its operational targets; it could link with the 2015 target set by the Millennium Development Goals (4) It would be more significant if the Global Strategy could have a Global Monitoring System as opposed to the current status where there are no reporting systems in place.

The GSIYCF is unique for its integrated comprehensive approach and acts upon the understanding that the youngest members of the world depend on the commitment of all actors to achieving optimal health outcomes by protecting, promoting and supporting breastfeeding and ensuring adequate and nutritious complementary feeding even under exceptionally difficult circumstances. WABA being mandated to act upon the Innocenti Declarations (1990 and 2005) fully supports the implementation of the GSIYF and is committed to ensuring the success of the Global Strategy targets. It welcomes and calls on all parties to take steps to do the same and help save 1.3 million lives a year.

## References:

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## For more information

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