

29 June 2005

Dear Friends:

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is pleased to join the World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA), WHO and international NGO partners, and its affiliates in 120 countries in the celebration of World Breastfeeding Week, 1-7 August 2005.

The theme for this year, "Breastfeeding and Family Foods: Loving and Healthy – Feeding other foods while breastfeeding is continued" reminds us of the vital importance of complementary feeding. UNICEF supports WHO and health agencies worldwide in recommending that mothers breastfeed their babies exclusively for the first 6 months, and then continue to breastfeed while providing timely, nutritionally adequate, safe and responsively-fed complementary foods for 2 years or longer.

In endorsing the WHO/UNICEF Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding in 2002, UNICEF clarified that we call, with urgency, for action on these issues. There are still nearly 11 million children who die every year of preventable causes. Almost always they are the poorest and most marginalized. According to best evidence, appropriate breastfeeding could prevent at least 1.3 million of these deaths, and complementary feeding, another 587,000. Together these two improvements in nutrition and child care, alone, could save more than 5,000 lives each and every day.

In addition to this profound direct impact, there is no question that poor infant feeding practices lead to malnutrition in later childhood, and that being undernourished shares the blame for about half of the remaining needless child deaths each year.

UNICEF strives to create an environment that enables the best choices in infant and young child feeding practices by supporting the breastfeeding and complementary feeding efforts of partner countries and our NGO colleagues at three levels: improving national regulation and oversight, enhancing the knowledge and skills of health personnel, and increasing success in the community by providing support for each new mother to make the best choices in feeding her children.

If we are to fulfill the promise of the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals, we must renew our attention to those interventions that are effective, affordable and have significant impact. Improvements in breastfeeding and complementary feeding are essential for success in child survival, in reducing hunger, and to ensure that children develop in a manner that they may best benefit from education and opportunity.

UNICEF applauds the commitment of all of those involved in support of child survival through optimal infant and young child feeding in the celebration of this year's World Breastfeeding Week.

Yours sincerely,



Ann M. Veneman
Executive Director