

Hon'ble Sh Salman Khurshid, Union Minister of External Affairs, Government of India:

Hon'ble Smt Krishna Tirath Minister of State (Independent Charge), Ministry of Women and Child Development,

Mr. Prem Narain Secretary Government of India, MWCD

Mr.Louis-Georges Arsenault the UNICEF Representative for India

Mr. Donald Lu Deputy Chief of Mission Embassy of the USA

Ms. Helen Armstrong one of our IBFAN stalwarts

Andre Nikiema by International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN) Regional Coordinator of Francophone Africa

Dato Anwar Fazal Chairperson Emeritus World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA)

Dr. Shreeranjana Joint Secretary MWCD.

I am extremely happy to extend a warm welcome to you all.

In appreciation of the role of MWCD, and MOHFW Government of India in partnering with us to host this important event, and for certain steps the Government of India took in 1992, in the form of Infant Milk Substitutes Feeding Bottles, and Infant Foods (Regulation of Production, Supply and Distribution) Act 1992, and Amendment Act 2003. Let me read a message from our President and the Prime Minister of India this morning. We have also received messages from the Chief ministers of Delhi, Haryana, Goa, J&K, Gujaraat, and Kerala who in their messages have recognised the issue to be critical and wished success to this conference. I thank you all.

I am so delighted to welcome you dear friends, cant be expressed in words, more than 800 people from 86 countries of the world, a response you have shown is so overwhelming. More than 50 governments represented here, health professionals, activists, individuals, mother support leaders, more than 100 international and national civil society organisations, several people from UN agencies like UNICEF, WHO, ILO, World Bank, who have come forward to support this event, and international donors like Sida, Norad, USAID, UKAid, AUSAid. A very warm welcome to you all.

Key is your participation and a unique nature of the conference organised by the gBICS. We couldn't expect more. The conference sets in a platform of exchange for us all and trend for the future.

The gBICS is a joint IBFAN –WABA Initiative, the two international civil society organisations working to protect, promote and support breastfeeding since 33 years and 21 years respectively, has over the past 4-5 years led to assess the policy status of the implementation of the Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding, through its innovative and break through tool, the World Breastfeeding Trends Initiative (WBTi). It has been introduced in nearly 100 countries and completed work in 51 countries where in 475 partners together worked on assessing, analyzing

and then advocating the situation. The conference is a reflection of these national partnerships that led to national reports and we here in our local office compiled to make a comprehensive report of 51 countries.

This makes it a unique first of its kind in the world, a conference that discusses policy gaps and solutions sitting together with the governments, we so value a partnership with and like to strengthen this further.

Thank you all, for joining this fight. The fight is about the lives of 136 million mother baby dyads. Out of 136 million born each year 92 million are NOT able to practice the optimal feeding by the time they are six months, as WHO recommends, i.e. initiation of breastfeeding within one hour of birth and exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months. And further 6 months to 2 years again feeding practice remains problematic.

Thus, the majority of infants are subjected to artificial feeding (infant formula, other milk products) before 6 months of age, which leads to a higher risk of contracting diarrhoea, pneumonia, and other infections; more obesity, and non-communicable diseases of adult life like diabetes and hypertension. May be we could call these babies enter into a “disease –net”, and “NCD –net” so early in their life. The fight is about reducing this number. The worry is this number is not changing for the past few decades.

Babies need mom –made not man –made is the campaign designed to take this fight to a new scale.

The FIGHT

There is growing evidence of the harms done by the man made stuff, the alternatives. At the same time there is growing ‘**thickness**’ of the partnership paradigm called PPP and baby food and other food industry shifts the balance away from peoples interest. This makes the fight even more challenging. There are other elements, like getting support for women in the work place as well as during work to be able to breastfeed their babies. Thirdly, a challenge to get universal health system support to mothers who deliver either at home or in a health facility, the global figure 43% babies can begin breastfeeding within one hour shows how beginning of life is at risk as the alternative ‘formula’ comes running and competes with breastfeeding, many a times marketing and promotion ends up in undermining women’s ability to breastfeed.

But why? This is the question we need to answer, why it’s taking so long, we had Health for all, then we had MDGs, and we will have another call! We need to ask this question, why it is not happening and babies continue to die in large numbers of preventable deaths and when we know the evidence that breastfeeding is the single most effective intervention to enhance child survival,

why the numbers of alternatively fed are not going down. Why do we allow it to happen, the World Breastfeeding Conference 2012 will surely ponder over these questions.

Friends, the fight is real, and can be won. Your commitment shows that it can be. Increasing breastfeeding rates is not easy, but certainly possible and we have to move away from ad-hocism to coordinated actions.

Thank you friends once again, time has come perhaps to change the situation and I wish this conference serves as a turning point in this history of infant feeding.

Thank you all,

6 Dec 2012 Arun Gupta at the opening of The World Breastfeeding Conference 2012