

EAM's Speech at the World Breastfeeding Conference 2012
[0900 Hrs 6th Dec 2012 India Habitat Centre]

- Smt Krishna Tirath, Minister of Women and Child Development.
- Dr. Arun Gupta, Regional Coordinator, IBFAN Asia, Chairperson gBICS/ and the World Breastfeeding Conference 2012
- Ms Joyce Chanetsa, Convener and Chair Global Council of International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN)
- Dato Anwar Fazal Chairperson Emeritus World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA)
- Ms Tine Staermose, Director ILO India,
- Mr. Nicholas Alipui, Chief of Programmes, UNICEF NY HQ,
- Mr. Donald Lu, Deputy Chief of Mission, Embassy of the USA
- Ms. Helen Armstrong, the key note speaker a key IBFAN personality now retired

Delegates, Friends, ladies and gentlemen, from over 80 countries of the world.

I welcome you to India

I am delighted to be here for this event that the Ministries of Health and Family Welfare and the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India are hosting as the 'World Breastfeeding Conference-2012' along with the International Baby Food Action Network and WABA, in New Delhi. That it has the support of World Bank, World Health Organization, UNICEF, and many other agencies nationally and internationally is an indication of its immense significance.

The theme of the conference, 'Babies need Mom-made not man-made' and "Lets Protect Every Feeding Mother" is apt and topical for our times.

In 1981, when the World Health Assembly adopted the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes (Code) Late Smt. Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India made a stirring speech at the Assembly questioning the promotional practices of the companies making substitutes to mothers milk. She followed it by ensuring that India develop

its 'Indian National Code for Promotion of Breastfeeding' in 1983 and amend the extant PFA Act to include the labeling provisions for baby foods to curb marketing practices that undermine breastfeeding. Parliament of India enacted the *Infant Milk Substitutes Feeding Bottles, and Infant Foods (Regulation of Production, Supply and Distribution) Act 1992*, and later *Amendment Act 2003* made further improvements. India thus further strengthened the law in 2003 by banning all forms of promotion of baby foods made for children under the age two.

The conference theme has an urgency as we move into the next generation of market strategies for packaged and junk foods. We know too well the harmful effects these foods have on the overall health and development of our children. Breastfeeding is nature's nourishment and other feeding alternatives are artificial. Man-made substitutes and practice can impact negatively the baby's health - both physically and psychologically. Therefore such, artificial, man-made alternatives should be restricted and discouraged by policy, legal framework, and communication advocacy as well as education.

It is here that the World Breastfeeding Conference by bringing together professionals from a wide range of backgrounds, civil society organizations, international organizations, health professionals and social activists enter the picture. The Conference participants, by brainstorming the issue and the challenges can come up with practical solutions and policy guidelines to minimize the risks attributed to the absence of Breastfeeding.

Educating families is immensely important and priority needs to be given to low income groups, minority communities and marginal persons.

I would like to congratulate the organizers for this valuable effort to put together this conference that I hope would turn out to be a milestone and perhaps a turning point in the sustained efforts to move global and national policies of all countries in right direction.

I am delighted that the UN Special Rapporteur On The Right To Food has sent a video message to the delegates as he could not be here in person. Let me quote from one of his recent reports, that calls on countries committed to 'scaling up nutrition' to "begin by regulating the marketing of commercial infant formula and other breast milk substitutes,

in accordance with WHA resolution 63.23, and by implementing the full set of WHO recommendations on the marketing of breast milk substitutes and of foods and non-alcoholic beverages to children, in accordance with WHA resolution 63.14." He also called for "a clear exit strategy to empower communities to feed themselves." In such circumstances, "when ecosystems are able to support sustainable diets, nutrition programmes, policies and interventions supporting the use of supplements, RUTF [ready-to-use therapeutic foods], fortificants and infant formulas are inappropriate and can lead to malnutrition, and the marketing of these food substitutes and related products can contribute to major public health problems.")

There are two more important areas that I hope the Conference would deliberate on; health system support to women and maternity protection particularly to women who work in the un-organized sector and who are in poverty. This can be instrumental in delivering health equity as we know it. Medical science has established that breastfeeding reduces incidence of common diseases like diarrhea and pneumonia as well as related deaths, but it has to be supported systemically and on a sustained basis.

India is proud to host this important event that is timely, and I feel honoured to welcome government delegation from over 50 countries who have come to take part.

I wish you all success and look forward to the outcomes of this important gathering.

Thank you.