

**Draft speech for MOS (I/C) for the World Breastfeeding Conference
On 6th December 2012 at New Delhi**

1. Sh Salman Khurshid Hon'ble Minister of External Affairs Government of India
2. Dr. Arun Gupta, Regional Coordinator, IBFAN Asia, Chairperson gBICS/ and the World Breastfeeding Conference 2012
3. Ms Joyce Chanetsa, Convener and Chair Global Council of International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN)
4. Dato Anwar Fazal Chairperson Emeritus World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA)
5. Ms Tine Staermose , Director ILO India,
6. Mr. Nicholas Alipui, Chief of Programmes, UNICEF NY HQ,
7. Mr. Donald Lu, Deputy Chief of Mission, Embassy of the USA
8. Ms. Helen Armstrong, the key note speaker a key IBFAN personality now retired

H. Pran

I am extremely happy to be addressing this august gathering on this special topic of breastfeeding, which is very close to my heart both as a mother and as Minister of Women and Child Development. My Ministry represents voices of over 70% of population of this vast country having a population of 1.2 billion.

Breastfeeding is the gift of God to mankind and is the natural way of providing young infants with the all nutrients they need for healthy growth and development. Virtually all mothers can breastfeed, yet this simple practice seems to have become a difficult task and daunting for most countries and societies across the World.

Breastfeeding has been recognized as one of the most effective ways to ensure child health and survival. Optimal breastfeeding together with complementary feeding helps prevent malnutrition and can save about a million child lives.

I also understand that 1/5th of child mortality (under 5) is prevented through exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months and appropriate complementary feeding after 6 months.

Globally less than 40% of infants under six months of age are exclusively breastfed. The reason being lack of accurate information and awareness, poor support of family and society, poor maternal child care system including absence of enabling environment for maternal support.

These benefits of a simple practice cannot be ignored and adequate breastfeeding support for mothers and families could increase breastfeeding worldwide.

“Taking stock of policies and programmes” the theme for World Breastfeeding week this year was very apt and timely preceding this World Conference.

It is time for all of us to act and look back and set the stage for change of behaviour, mindsets and make an honest attempt to improve the unacceptable levels of breastfeeding worldwide.

Though there has been a steady improvement in the rates of initiation of breastfeeding and exclusive breastfeeding in India, however more efforts need to be put in this direction

I would take the opportunity to share the initiatives we have taken in India to protect, promote and support breastfeeding.

In India we have followed it up with a National Guidelines on infant and young child feeding in 2004 and these are updated in 2006.

Ministry of Women and Child Development was instrumental in development of the legislation as a follow up to the International Code of Marketing of Breast milk Substitutes (Code) and propose a Bill in the Parliament. After the enactment of the Infant Milk Substitutes Feeding Bottles, and Infant Foods (Regulation of Production, Supply and Distribution) Act 1992, the Act was further amended in 2003

However there is a need to ensure and monitor the compliance of the IMS Act. Support of professionals and civil society is needed to ensure strict adherence. A proactive and expeditious system of legal disposal of cases is pertinent.

I value our long partnership with International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN) and Breastfeeding Promotion Network of India (BPNI) and proud to be a partner in organizing this Conference

I wish to congratulate International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN) and particularly its Asia centre here in India, the Breastfeeding Promotion Network of India who have been able to initiate a process of policy assessments in India and 80 more countries, 51 countries have completed this work, India has also completed its assessment in 2012, which is third time since 2005. We are closely following up on the policy assessments and try to address these gaps in India's next five year plan 2012-2017.

Integrated Child Development Services, (ICDS) which is the largest outreach programme for nutrition, health and early learning. The Government has recently approved the strengthened and restructuring of this programme to address key issues related to, enhancing nutritional impact, reaching the pregnant mothers, newborns, infants and young children under three years in the family and community effectively, changing caring and feeding behaviours in the family.

The programme currently reaches out to about 80 million children under six years of age and 20 million pregnant and lactating mothers through a network of 1.3 million child development centres called 'Anganwadi centres'.

One of the major programmatic reforms introduced under the scheme is the inclusion of IYCF counseling as a component in the redesigned service package. We have also introduced an additional dedicated worker in 200 high burden districts to address the critical issues of IYCF for under 3s with special focus on under 6 months children.

Another initiative of my Ministry is the Indira Gandhi Matritiya Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY) this is a maternity benefit scheme with conditional cash transfer of Rs 4000 for maternal care with provision of promoting breastfeeding. The Government also has the provision of maternity leave (6 months) and childcare leave of 2 years.

To address the critical area of education and building awareness of adolescent girls, the Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent girls (SABLA). has been introduced by the Ministry.

These efforts have been complemented by the initiatives of the health system in India through National Rural Health Mission (NRHM). Promotion of Institutional

deliveries and early initiation of breastfeeding through the Janani Suraksha Yojana. Cashless care for neonates and pregnant mothers for the first 30 days through the Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakaram and provision of skilled nutrition counselling at health facilities at all levels will help to promote breastfeeding.

The key to successful breastfeeding is appropriate IEC and behavior change recognizing this, the nationwide IEC campaign against malnutrition recently launched asserts on key messages of breastfeeding. This campaign will use a wide range of channels media, print etc to convey information and motivational messages to mothers, families and community at large.

I am happy to note that participants for the World Breastfeeding Conference 2012 span across various sectors of the Governments concerned with women, children, public health, and labour etc., UN agencies, international organisations, public interest civil society organisations and coalitions, donors, professional bodies, public interest health networks, human rights groups and development groups.

World conferences are also meant to provide a benchmark for the international community to measure achievements, identify gaps and trigger corrective actions, and estimate global resource requirements

I hope the deliberations of this World Conference will highlight key priority areas that must be addressed to alleviate the challenges and issues, so that optimal nutrition and health of children can be achieved.

I wish the organizers IBFAN and WABA all the success and hope the conference provides us with required outcomes.

I welcome you all and invite you to come forward proactively to promote, protect and support breastfeeding.

Jai Hind