

## PRESS RELEASE



# No 'sunset clause' please! NGOs call for vigilance on harmful marketing

WHO Executive Board meeting, Geneva, 7<sup>th</sup> February 2020

Civil society NGOs attending WHO's Executive Board meeting ahead of the May World Health Assembly are protesting against a new Decision – drafted by WHO and to be debated today – proposing that in an effort to take pressure off the agenda and 'streamline' - biennial reporting of controls on marketing of baby formulas and foods should end in 2026. The NGOs warn that WHO must keep a close watch on all commercial promotion that has the potential to harm health - whether on baby foods, tobacco, junk foods, alcohol or pharmaceuticals.

The International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN), the 40-year-old global network that protects breastfeeding and infant and young child health, has worked alongside WHO for perhaps the longest. A major achievement of IBFAN's work was the adoption of the *International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes* in 1981 in response to the evidence that 1.5 million babies were dying every year because they are not breastfed and that marketing was a major contributory factor. Over 800,000 babies continue to die each year because they are not breastfed<sup>1</sup>

The *International Code* was the first global consumer protection code of its kind and made strong recommendations to its Member States to end the commercial promotion of these products. One of its key requirements was that Member States report back to WHO on its implementation every two years. Because of this, the Assembly regularly heard about marketing tactics that threaten children's health and survival – despite the industry's claims of code compliance. As a consequence, 19 Resolutions were adopted that clarified, strengthened and updated the original Code. Although [85% of the 198 countries](#) have taken some action to implement the Code, under pressure from industry and trade bodies to weaken safeguards, far too many of these laws are too weak or rely on the voluntary cooperation of the companies.

The producer countries and corporations that profit from the fast-growing baby food market such as Swiss Nestlé, French Danone, US Mead Johnson and Abbott Ross, have always wanted this troublesome issue taken off WHO's agenda and confined to history but have dared not say so openly.

Speaking for IBFAN, Patti Rundall: *"We know that harmful marketing will not stop until every country has strong laws that are independently monitored and enforced. The multi-stakeholder partnership ideology that WHO is now embracing is making things much worse, with corporations being given unprecedented access to policy framing and setting spaces. We know there are many important issues on WHO's agenda, but this attempt to sunset one of its most effective and essential safeguards can only be the result of private sector influence on WHO's governance. To describe it as 'streamlining' is disingenuous. If WHO is going to sunset its decisions, then please start with ones that are doing little or nothing to protect health."*

For more information contact:

Patti Rundall, Baby Milk Action/ IBFAN Global Council: [prundall@babymilkaction.org](mailto:prundall@babymilkaction.org) +447786523493

Alison Linnecar, IBFAN WG convenor on Climate and Contaminant issues: [alinnecar@gmail.com](mailto:alinnecar@gmail.com)

Dr Marina Rea, IBFAN Brazil/IBFAN Global Council: [marifrea@usp.br](mailto:marifrea@usp.br)

---

<sup>1</sup> (Lancet 2016)