



# IBFAN

International Baby Food Action Network  
Red internacional de grupos pro alimentación infantil  
Réseau international des groupes d'action pour l'alimentation infantile

## GLOBAL COUNCIL

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Baby Milk Action,  
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Dr Mark Carney  
United Nations Special Envoy for Climate Action and Finance  
The UK Prime Minister's Finance Advisor for COP26  
Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS)  
1 Victoria Street, Westminster, London SW1H 0ET

20th January 2021

### **Reith Lecture 2020 'How We Get What We Value.' Is Danone really a good model to follow?**

Dear Dr Carney

We are writing on behalf of the International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN), the 40-year old global network of 270 citizens' groups who work in over 160 countries to protect breastfeeding and young child health through the ending of harmful marketing.<sup>i</sup>

We listened to your [2020 Reith Lectures](#) and found them inspiring and enlightening. Thank you so much for focusing your talents and energies on Climate Change. However, in the discussion after Lecture 1 we were surprised to hear you cite Danone as an example of an ethical company that "*has totally re-oriented itself and shifted along that continuum towards rebalancing purpose and profit.*"

We believe this praise to be unjustified and would like to explain why.

IBFAN has monitored company activity and assisted governments in bringing in regulations before and since the 1981 World Health Assembly adopted the *International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes*. 19 WHA Resolutions have been adopted that clarify and strengthen ambiguous points and address emerging health problems. These resolutions are integral to the Code, have the same legal standing and should be read with it.<sup>ii</sup> 'The Code' is a minimum standard for all countries and is a regulation in a class of its own under human rights law. States have an obligation to implement it and companies have obligations to comply with it.<sup>iii</sup>

Legal status aside, leading mother and child health experts are agreed that the Code is a critically important safeguard for infant and young child health and survival. It does not prohibit the availability or use of breastmilk substitutes, but protects the rights of all parents and carers to make fully informed decisions, free from commercial influences.

Despite being a late entrant to the baby food market, Danone is now the world's second largest manufacturer, a status it has achieved through persistent flouting of the Code. Danone leads the baby food industry in its misinterpretation of the Code that ignores most of the WHA Resolutions and its undermining of governments attempts to regulate in the public interest. To date IBFAN's independent monitoring has been unable to find any sign that Danone is changing its marketing strategy for its 'Early Life Nutrition' range (which forms 23% of its business).<sup>iv</sup> Its policy continues to be substantially weaker than the Code in terms of scope, reach, conflicts of interest, promotional claims, donations, gifts and sponsorship. Each weakness undermining sound infant feeding practices and support and risking child health and survival.<sup>v</sup>

Danone's undermining of breastfeeding, in itself an ecological act, has a negative impact on Green House Gases (GHG), water conservation; bio-diversity, deforestation, waste and pollution.

### **1998 RECIPIENT OF THE RIGHT LIVELIHOOD AWARD**

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Below we cite just four concrete examples:

1. [Danone has exploited the Covid-19 pandemic](#), including the publication of a misleading *YouTube* ‘advice’ Channel for Indian mothers. This ‘advice channel’ violates the Indian law as well as WHO and UNICEF’s advice on COVID-19 and Conflicts of Interest.<sup>vi,vii</sup> Danone also sponsors conferences and seminars for health workers in India, violating labelling norms and giving incentives to increase sales.
2. [Danone uses social media in In South-East](#) Asia to promote products to mothers and then exploits them to create online marketing material.<sup>viii</sup>
3. [Danone attempts to weaken Codex Global Trading Standards](#) Danone knows that Codex standards have a long lasting influence on national legislation and public health, yet it ignores the concerns of WHO, UNICEF, many governments and IBFAN about the health implications of its globally traded sweetened and ultra-processed foods (UPFs) for older babies. These unnecessary products are not covered by Danone’s policy and are deceptively branded to resemble infant formula for newborns (products needed for babies who are not breastfed).<sup>ix,x</sup> UPFs also harm the environment as the links below show. As Dr Julie Smith, of the Australian National University, found: *“The most alarming finding in our latest research is a very large proportion of greenhouse gas emission impact is associated with the so-called growing up milks or toddler formula ... In China, nearly half of the sales of milk formula is toddler formula.”*<sup>xi</sup>
4. [Danone bases its claims to be Code-compliant on compromised assessments](#) such as [BCorporation Certification](#), including its bottled water and *Early Life Nutrition* businesses in [China](#), Italy and other countries.<sup>xii</sup> Danone uses BCorps and the *Access to Nutrition Index*, Danone presents itself as a trustworthy partner in nutrition – a tactic commonly used by many corporations.<sup>xiii</sup>

We would be happy to discuss with you or provide further information if you believe we are mistaken in our assessment. Our concern is only to ensure that information on these matters is fair and correct.

With many thanks for taking the trouble to read this letter and hoping you will take our concerns into account in your important task ahead.



Patti Rundall and Dr JP Dadhich on behalf of IBFAN’s Global Council

CC:

Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director General, WHO,  
Henrietta Fore, Executive Director, UNICEF  
General Qu Dongyu, Director General, FAO

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- <sup>i</sup> 2020 [WHO/UNICEF/IBFAN report on the Code implementation](#). To date 70% of countries have *some* legislation based on the Code
- <sup>ii</sup> [19 WHA Resolutions](#) have been adopted since 1981. Eight resolutions have called for conflicts of interest safeguards..
- <sup>iii</sup> UN CRC General Comment no. 15 and 16 (2013) and UN ECOSOC General Comment no. 24 (2017) in combination with International Court of Justice Judgement of 30 November 2010 concerning Ahmadou Sadio Diallo (Republic of Guinea v. Democratic Republic of Congo). Also see [Extraterritorial Obligations and the Code Feb 2018](#) Discussion paper, February 2018. The Maastricht Principles on Extraterritorial Obligations of States in the Area of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes. Independent Review Panel of the UN Secretary-General's Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health (2016-2030) recommends developing a global human rights framework to address harmful marketing of foods for and to children
- Shubber, S.: *The WHO International Code of Marketing of Breast-Milk Substitutes: History and Analysis*. Pinter & Martin Ltd. 2011.
- <sup>iv</sup> [Danone Home Page Danone's Commitments](#) (accessed January 2021) show the limited nature of its policy."
- <sup>v</sup> *Breaking the Rules Stretching the Rules (BTR)* IBFAN/ICDC 2017 see [Danone Profile pages 24-29 BTR 2017](#)
- <sup>vi</sup> [Marketing of breastmilk substitutes during the COVID-19 pandemic](#), Lancet, 8.10.20 [India's efforts to promote breastfeeding are threatened by covid-19, as misguided fears of infection see newborns separated from mothers and formula milk promoted](#)" BMJ 2020;370:m3316
- <sup>vii</sup> [How companies are exploiting COVID19](#). Some visual examples
- <sup>viii</sup> [The baby brands turning Indonesian Instagram into free formula ads](#), R.Furieux, Bureau of Investigative Journalism, 30.7.20.
- <sup>ix</sup> [Exporting countries put trade before the health of the planet and children](#), IBFAN Press Release, 4.12.2019, [Trade body tackles misleading labelling of look-alike milks](#). IBFAN Press Release Dec, 2018, [French and US Trade delegations put child health at risk](#), Dec 2017
- <sup>x</sup> [Articles and reports relating to Ultra-processed foods](#) [Marketing and Conflicts of Interest in Science of UPFs](#) [Policy responses to ultra-processed foods in global context](#) [UPFs, Background, concepts, and scientific evidence](#) [How to identify and reduce consumption of UPFs](#)
- <sup>xi</sup> [Articles and reports relating to environmental impact of milk formulas:](#)  
[Calls to curb infant formula's carbon footprint, December 4, 2019](#), [Carbon Footprint Due to Milk Formula. A study from selected countries of the Asia Pacific Region](#) IBFAN BPNI [Greenfeeding Report cards on 10 Asian countries. A commentary on the carbon footprint of milk formula: harms to planetary health and policy implications](#), Smith, J.P. *Int Breastfeed J* **14**, 49 (2019).
- <sup>xii</sup> [BCorps assessment of Danone Early Life Nutrition in China](#).. "The Chinese infant nutrition market holds great growth potential for Danone". The *Access to Nutrition Index* (ATNI) claims to be 'independent from the companies it assesses.' However ATNI closely collaborates with these companies on the methodology and presentation of its results. Such collaboration is in direct conflict with [WHA Resolution 49.15](#) that calls for monitoring to be "...carried out in a transparent, independent manner, free from commercial influence." ATNI criteria is also weak in key areas, especially on conflicts of interest. [Danone -highlighting its top BMS company status](#). [Danone's use of ATNI](#) [Danone UK engaging HSG to launch a consumer care line](#)
- <sup>xiii</sup> [Interference in public health policy: examples of how the baby food industry uses tobacco industry tactics](#). *World Nutrition* 2017

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