



## WHO EB154 Jan 22-27 2024. IBFAN statements

### Agenda Item: 20. Maternal, infant and young child nutrition

WHO should be proud of the materials on marketing it has produced under DrTedros' tenure. The guidance on digital marketing is a key part of the package that will help governments lower health care costs and save lives.

Digital marketing is now out of control with companies paying influencers and using algorithms and deceptive schemes to target pregnant and lactating women and convince them that their expensive, risky, environmentally wasteful products are essential for children's health. The Guidance doesn't prevent any person buying products they need but could stop predatory marketing at source. A WHA resolution would help Member States protect optimal infant and young child feeding without fear of trade challenges. Misleading digital marketing will only get worse if the Guidance sits on the shelf ignored.

### Agenda Item: 14. WHO's work in health emergencies

Thank you, Madam chair. We witness in horror the worst human catastrophe in recent times with refugees now a permanent emergency. As WHO comes under yet more pressure to be 'operational' its key norm-setting role must be maintained and protected with transparent, sustainable funding, free from commercial influence. Emergency responses relying on the provision of products and short term Ready to use products should never be inappropriately promoted or commercially exploited and must never undermine breastfeeding, indigenous complementary foods or culturally acceptable local food solutions when possible. Responses should include skilled breastfeeding support, skin-to-skin, re-lactation and wet nursing. The Code, IFE Operational Guidance and IFE materials are key tools in emergency preparedness and response. Lastly, the deprivation of food, water and medical supplies should never be imposed as a weapon of war.

### Agenda Item: 24.2 [Draft fourteenth general programme of work](#) Monday 22nd, 4.30pm. [YOUTUBE](#)

Thank you Madam Chair. The 14th GPW has a critical role to play and it should highlight and include the following:

- Protection of breastfeeding throughout all WHO local offices – especially from new strategies such as digital marketing that is out of control.
- WHO has a key role in ensuring policy coherence in WTO and Codex trade rules. This helps Member States regulate marketing in line with WHO recommendations, without fear of challenge.
- The pressure to be 'operational' should not undermine WHO's key norm-setting role, nor should WHO's desire to streamline prevent new Resolutions going forward that save children's lives.
- WHO's own internal policy must be free from undue commercial influence and FENSA must be strengthened to safeguard WHO's independence, integrity and trustworthiness
- Flexible funding should be increased and anonymous donations forbidden, especially when ear-marked for specific programmes. Thank you.

## **Agenda Item 12 Acceleration towards the Sustainable Development Goal targets for maternal health and child mortality**

The most vulnerable members of our society are often the ones hardest hit by conflicts and emergencies. One of the most important safeguards for maternal health and the prevention of child mortality is breastfeeding. It is the foundation for all 17 SDGs. It is the single most effective intervention in preventing deaths in children under five. And for mothers, it has a preventive effect on hypertension, Type II diabetes and breast cancer. Women have the right to feed their babies as they wish, but those rights cannot be fulfilled without support and protection from misleading marketing that promotes unnecessary, expensive, ultra-processed products. Member States have a sovereign right and duty to adopt equitable, effective laws to protect citizens, make climate-smart decisions and prevent harmful marketing.

## **Agenda Item: 22. Climate change, pollution and health**

Despite contributing the least to the climate problem, newborns with undeveloped immune systems and children bear the worst consequences. Breastfeeding is a lifeline in climate related emergencies and the most environmentally friendly way to feed young children.

IBFAN has followed Codex for decades and agreed with Dr Tedros' warning that a transformation of the world's food systems is needed urgently. The current corporate-led food system allows health-harming industries to undermine local agriculture, breastfeeding and biodiverse food systems. Ultra-processed products with large greenhouse gas, carbon, micro-plastic, water and land footprint are promoted with greenwashing claims as the solution to the climate crisis. This has to stop. WHO must make women and children a top priority and Member States must hold companies accountable for any harm they may cause.

## **Agenda Item: 25.4 Engagement with non-State actors**

As an NGOs that has worked alongside WHO for over 40 years, IBFAN has followed the FENSA engagement process from the outset with concern. We understand the pressure on WHO to use FENSA as an enabling framework for funding, but WHO has too important a role to risk this and since the outset we have urged caution. WHO has so far failed to correct its confusing and inadequate Conflict of Interest definition and terminology – and while strong on the need to prevent tobacco industry interference in policy and programme setting, is too often silent on other health harming industries. This silence leads to misplaced trust, image transfer and public-private entanglements with problematic industries who promote here-today-gone-tomorrow voluntary commitments. The term 'partnership' in relation to corporate entities is especially problematic because it implies shared decision-making that compromises the ability to act in the best interests of the public. Any decision to engage should be rooted in a careful assessment and analysis of power imbalances and other risks.

For more information contact IBFAN team in Geneva:

Patti Rundall. [prundall@babymilkaction.org](mailto:prundall@babymilkaction.org) +44 7786 423493

Ellie Mulpeter [info@infactusa.org](mailto:info@infactusa.org)


Nair Carrasco [naircarrasco@gmail.com](mailto:naircarrasco@gmail.com)

 Website: <https://www.ibfan.org/ibfan-statements-at-the-who-executive-board-meeting>

 Instagram: [https://www.instagram.com/p/C2a4hh6Cdx\\_/](https://www.instagram.com/p/C2a4hh6Cdx_/)

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