



### World Health Assembly says no to commercial sponsorship and yes to independent monitoring

On 25 May a World Health Assembly Resolution was unanimously adopted which addressed the issue of commercial sponsorship, the need for independent monitoring and the need to ensure safe marketing of complementary foods.

The baby food industry, anxious to expand the market for complementary foods and to be included in all monitoring programmes, was out in force opposing the key points of the Resolution. They claimed that if we all learn to collaborate and trust each other, the issue could safely be taken off WHO's busy agenda. However, in the two-hour debate every amendment in favour of the compa-



**Delegates at the 49th World Health Assembly in Geneva, May 1996, celebrate an important victory. The photo includes some of the key advocates for the resolution from: the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Zimbabwe, Venezuela and Swaziland; also IBFAN delegates from India, Philippines, Netherlands, Switzerland, U.K.** Photo: Patti Rundall

nies was thrown out, and the Assembly voted unanimously to step up its advocacy.

Rush Ashton, speaking on behalf of the International Confederation of Midwives, explained to delegates why in 1986 the ICM took the decision not to accept sponsorship from infant formula manufacturers at any congresses, conferences or meetings, "Our experience, like that of others, is that the needs of mothers for the professional support of midwives in achieving successful breastfeeding can be undermined by pressures associated with both the offer and acceptance of financial or other support from manufacturers involved in the infant formula industry, including manufacturers of bottles and teats".

Dr Timothy Stamps, Minister of Health and Child Welfare for Zimbabwe lambasted the companies and Nestlé in particular, explaining how the inappropriate marketing of baby milks and foods encourages mothers to buy expensive imported products rather than the traditional foods. Supporting the call for control of commercial sponsorship he described how Nestle attempts to buy the allegiance of health workers with special awards and gifts.

- The baby food industry has given no indication that it will abide by this new Resolution - or the one passed in 1994 (WHA 47.5).
- The Royal College of Midwives has expressed interest in finding out the extent of commercial sponsorship of midwives in relation to training and updating in the UK.

Can you help by publicising the Resolution and investigating your own university, college, hospital or Trust?

**ACTION POINT**

**"In the process of Western acculturation, people have been led to believe that breastfeeding is primitive... Powerful companies exploit developing countries using intensive and attractive marketing techniques. I will take this Resolution home to use as a piece of firewood to combat the factors which negatively affect child nutrition."** Dr Otto, Delegate from Palau

#### WHA Resolution 49.15:

"... Concerned that health Institutions and ministries may be subject to subtle pressure to accept, inappropriately, financial or other support for professional training in infant and child health... Member states are urged to: "ensure that the financial support for professionals working in infant and young child health does not create conflicts of interest. ... and to ensure that monitoring of the International Code is carried out in a "... transparent, independent manner, free from commercial influence." and that "... complementary foods are not marketed for or used in ways that undermine exclusive and sustained breastfeeding"