

Date: 9 July 2007

To: UNICEF and WHO Representatives

From: Ms. Anupama Rao Singh, 
Regional Director, UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office

Dr. Shigeru Omi, 
Regional Director, WHO Western Pacific Regional Office

Subject: **World Breastfeeding Week 1-7 August 2007**

With World Breastfeeding Week just around the corner, we would like to take this opportunity to brief you on regional initiatives underway and also strongly urge your offices to support activities to celebrate this important occasion.

The theme for this year's World Breastfeeding Week is to **initiate breastfeeding in the 1st hour of a child's life**. This initial contact, as well as exclusive breastfeeding for six months, has the potential to save one million lives and is critical to reduce persistently high neonatal mortality.

Many of you are already involved, along with country level counterparts within the Ministry of Health, breastfeeding associations and community networks, in planning activities for World Breastfeeding Week. We believe that strong support from UNICEF and WHO country offices will give added leadership, visibility and voice to these campaigns, which is extremely important at a time when many countries in the region face a downward trend in exclusive breastfeeding rates.

The recent joint regional WHO and UNICEF technical consultation on breastfeeding, held in Manila from the 20-22 June, demonstrated the urgent need to do more to promote, protect and support breastfeeding and underscored its significance as a key component in the success of the Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding.

The challenge in many countries in this region is to counteract the persuasive trend to a bottle feeding culture, in part spurred by the aggressive marketing of infant formula and weak monitoring and enforcement of the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes.

The Manila consultation made concise recommendations that we hope can be pursued in countries and also supported at a regional level. The broad recommendations, listed in detail in the attached power point, include:

- Increase our understanding and knowledge of the economics of breastfeeding, especially our ability to track the public health costs of associated illness, calculate the value of breast milk as a food resource and track the impact of advertising and industry activity on behaviour.
- Strengthen our use of data, communication and advocacy to better promote the benefits of breastfeeding and counteract the influence of the infant food industry.
- Advocate with governments to link BFHI certification with policies for hospital accreditation to accelerate and institutionalize the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative and to expand the Initiative to health facilities and community.
- Address the social, economic and legal barriers that continue to hinder women from breastfeeding.
- Better equip health professionals with the skills and knowledge on the importance of breastfeeding and how to best support lactation.

- Build the capacity of Governments and partners to monitor and enforce Code compliance.

As part of our support to country level activities during World Breastfeeding Week, we are pleased to announce that a new television spot focused on the importance of initiating breastfeeding in the first hour will be available.

The 3D animated, 45-second public service announcement will be available to download on 27 July. It can then be dubbed and packaged with a short key message in local languages and made available for broadcast in your respective countries. More detailed instructions on how to download the spot plus the script will be sent out to your respective communication officers in the next day or so.

UNICEF Executive Director Ann Veneman in her global statement in support of this year's World Breastfeeding Week stressed that the challenge "is to find creative and convincing ways at the community level to encourage breastfeeding and to provide national authorities with solid evidence of the advantages of promoting breastfeeding at the national level."

We hope that the TV spot, along with other campaign materials being produced in the region, can help advance this cause.

As WHO Director General Dr Margaret Chan said in her global statement on this year's theme, "in a world where more than 10 million children die before their fifth birthday due to preventable causes, and where malnutrition is still rampant and associated with over half of all childhood deaths, there is simply no time to waste. Let's start with the first hour!"

We hope you will use World Breastfeeding Week as a way to garner more attention and commitment to this vital component of child survival and nutrition. We look forward to hearing more about the activities planned in your respective countries and sharing these with others. Our teams in both regional offices are on stand by to provide any technical support that may be needed.

We wish you all the best for your World Breastfeeding Week celebrations.

Focal people in the Regional Offices are:

- Tommaso Cavalli-Sforza (Nutrition) and Marianna Trias (Child and Adolescent Health) in WHO WPRO
- Karen Codling (Nutrition) and Susan Mackay (Programme Communications) in UNICEF EAPRO

Attachments:

Joint Technical Consultation Recommendations

World Health Organization Director General Statement on World Breastfeeding Week

UNICEF Executive Director Statement on World Breastfeeding Week

PSA Script and Instructions

WABA World Breastfeeding week 2007 action folder