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***The situation of Infant and young child feeding in Switzerland
Statement to the Committee of the Rights of the Child June 2014***

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on the behalf of the International Baby Food Action Network – a worldwide civil-society network of more than 275 groups in 168 countries working on protection promotion and support of infant and young child feeding.

To start with, on a positive note, Switzerland can be commended for very recently ratifying the ILO Convention 183 on maternity protection, by revising their legislation to ensure that all working mothers are granted paid breastfeeding breaks until their child is one year of age.

Unfortunately, however, Switzerland does not have a comprehensive national strategy on protection, promotion and support to infant and young child feeding in line with the Global strategy for infant and young child feeding adopted at WHA in 2002 and the 2003 CRC General Comment N.15 on article 24. The Swiss national strategy to promote healthy diets initiated in 2008 includes promotion of breastfeeding, and there is a national foundation tasked with breastfeeding promotion, but only a few cantons are funding small-scale breastfeeding promotion activities as part of their obesity prevention programs. Overall, political will and national planning and resources are insufficient to create a favorable environment for mothers and parents to make informed decisions and put them into practice. Although more than half of Swiss babies are born in baby-friendly hospitals, scarce international indicators reveal poor breastfeeding practices, with an exclusive breastfeeding rate of only 14%, early initiation of breastfeeding of 66% and no data on continued breastfeeding at 1 or 2 years. The rate of C-sections, a barrier to early initiation, is very high at 33%.

Protection of breastfeeding is insufficient. According to the General Comment N.15 on article 24, and General Comment N.16 on business and child rights, States are required to introduce into domestic law, implement and enforce internationally agreed standards concerning children's right to health, including the International Code on marketing of breast-milk substitutes and relevant subsequent WHA resolutions. Yet, the Swiss law does not cover all provisions of the International Code and applies only to infant formula until 6 months; what is more, monitoring at national level is not independent, as the panel responsible is jointly composed of experts and members of the baby food industry. In consequence, as an example, mothers of 4 month year old babies receive gift packages at home containing samples of follow-on formula and complementary foods marketed for infants from 4 months. Parents often receive conflicting information, including from health professionals who lack appropriate independent training and are faced with potential conflicts of interest induced by financial ties between their professional associations and the baby food industry.

Our recommendations to Switzerland therefore include the following:

- Set up a comprehensive data collection on IYCF which tracks key international IYCF indicators;
- Develop a national IYCF strategy with allocated funds and safeguards to prevent conflicts of interest in implementation;
- Improve health professionals curricula and strengthen their training, which should be free from conflicts of interests;
- Strengthen International Code implementation and enforcement, and set up an independent monitoring system;
- Strengthen BFHI implementation and include the “mother-friendly” criteria to encourage less invasive birthing procedures and give breastfeeding a better start;
- As part of its ETOs, ensure that baby food companies hosted on its territory comply with the International Code in all countries where they operate, according to CRC General Comments 15 and 16.

Thank you