IBFAN
defending breastfeeding

70th World Health Assembly – Geneva, May 2017

IBFAN statement on Agenda Item 12.1: Response to emergencies

Thank you for allowing us to speak on this important topic on behalf of the International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN), the 37-year-old-global network that protects breastfeeding and works for policy coherence with WHO's Resolutions, norms and guidance.

Our work is especially important in emergencies, where breastfeeding is a lifeline for infants and young children but where responses are often characterized by large influxes of unsolicited donations of breastmilk substitutes and products that do more harm than good.

Public appeals for funds often make this worse – repeating the myths used by the baby food industry for decades: that women can't breastfeed because of stress or malnourishment. Rarely do appeals highlight the resilience of breastfeeding or that artificially fed babies face many more risks to survival.

While the speedy delivery of products can be essential in certain circumstances, emergency relief protocols must prevent over-emphasis on product-based, quick-fix approaches to the treatment of malnutrition, approaches that can undermine confidence in more sustainable, local, bio-diverse foods. If breastmilk substitutes are required they must be purchased, distributed and used according to strict criteria. Sadly, emergencies are prime opportunities for commercial exploitation and for those whose main purpose is the expansion of what we call the '*Business of Malnutrition.'*

IBFAN's *World Breastfeeding Trends Initiative* assessment of policies and programmes on Infant feeding during Emergencies

show that implementation of global guidelines and recommendations on this is dismal.

We see WHO's role as norm-setting rather than operational – promoting prevention and emergency preparedness protocols that will improve food security in the long term, helping to reverse this situation and improve public health generally.

We look forward to continuing our work with WHO on this important issue.