

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF INFANT FOOD INDUSTRIES

(ICIFI)

SUMMARY POSITION STATEMENT RE PROPOSED WHO INTERNATIONAL CODE FOR THE MARKETING OF BREAST MILK SUBSTITUTES

ICIFI Member companies, representing 85% of infant formula sales in the developing countries, acknowledge that breast feeding is the best and safest method of feeding a baby during the first months of life.

The marketing practices of ICIFI member companies are selective, educationally orientated and designed to avoid discouraging breast feeding (ICIFI Charter).

While breast feeding is recommended in all societies and extended breast feeding is the norm in developing countries, some mothers are unable to breast feed, and many more need to supplement breast feeding early. Breast feeding is increasing in many industrialized countries, and where mothers in these countries choose not to breast feed or stop breast feeding early, it is mainly socio-economic factors, including career resumption or other personal preferences, that influence this choice. It is the mother's right to make this choice, based on professional advice if possible, and objective information about the advantages of breast feeding and alternative feeding methods.

Thus, there is a legitimate and substantial need for infant formula (breast milk substitutes and supplements of high nutritional quality) throughout the world. This need is often far from being satisfied, particularly in the developing countries where indigenous substitutes of inadequate nutritional and hygienic quality are the normal foods given to replace or to supplement breast milk. Industry has a responsibility to fulfill this need and to provide appropriate education to ensure proper use.

Extremist critics of the infant food industry have sought to minimize this need by a deliberate campaign of misinformation that ignores socio-economic and nutritional realities. The so-called Breast vs. Bottle controversy is based on the erroneous propositions that breast feeding and formula feeding are mutually exclusive alternatives, and that industry marketing practices are designed to compete with breast feeding. Hence current attempts to impose a detailed and unnecessarily restrictive code, which prohibits essential educational programmes, disrupts the professional relationship between industry and the Health Professions, and applies to all countries regardless of their economic, cultural, or political differences, would be counter-productive, if the aim is to ensure safe and adequate nutrition for children everywhere.

Against this background and based on the consultations with health professionals and government officials, ICIFI Members position on the proposed WHO Code is therefore as follows :

1. ICIFI endorses the basic principle agreed at the WHO/UNICEF meeting in October 1979 that infant formula marketing should be designed to ensure safe and adequate nutrition for infants without discouraging breast feeding.
2. ICIFI supports the concept of a realistic and relevant international code of general principles based on objective factors related to improved child health which provides the framework for appropriate national measures to meet specific national needs.
3. Throughout the WHO/UNICEF consultation process, ICIFI has criticized the form and content of the successive code drafts which were found to contain unacceptable provisions being too detailed, counter productive, and in parts, incompatible with the constitutional requirements of a number of countries.
4. ICIFI has consistently offered constructive proposals for modification of the Code to bring it in line with the spirit of the October 1979 meeting and to remove unworkable and unrealistic provisions.
5. Whilst some of ICIFI's proposals are reflected in the preamble and aim of the fourth draft code, many substantive points in the detailed provisions contain the same defects criticized during the consultation period. The 4th Draft Code does not fulfill the criteria referred to in (2) above.
6. ICIFI believes that the translation of any proposed code into relevant national measures will be possible only if governments have the necessary flexibility in adapting individual provisions of the Code to their own needs, given the wide variations in social, cultural, economic and political situations of different countries.
7. ICIFI will continue to co-operate with Governments in meeting their national requirements, which differ, of course, in each sovereign state.

ICIFI April 1981