

For Immediate Release

Press Release

7 March 2006 (International Women's Day-Women and Decision Making)

WABA calls for enabling women in all forms of decision-making

The World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) supports the call for women's greater empowerment and opportunity through realizing their right to livelihood, health, education, and political participation, and especially to decision-making of all forms, particularly those decisions that affect their lives and the lives of their children.

International Women's Day (8 March) is a time for taking stock of the overall status of the world's women. Over a decade ago the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women called for increasing women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership. Yet for many women today, particularly in developing countries, these are only words on paper. Women's decision-making ability and participation in public life are closely linked with women's overall advancement.

Consider, for instance, that women earn only 10 per cent of the world's income and own less than 1 per cent of the world's property, but they put in two-thirds of the world's working hours. During the past 20 years the number of rural women living in poverty has nearly doubled. Women constitute 60 per cent of the 1 billion adults who have no access to basic education.

Women shoulder multiple burdens. By participating in the workforce, they contribute to the growth of the national economy. They are also the primary providers of social reproduction, the care and maintenance of human beings. Yet because women's care-giving is done at home, without pay, nearly all countries overlook this contribution to the nation's well being and do not include it in their national economic accounts.

Frequently, cultural practices discriminate against women. Even today, many women are unable to exercise their social and economic rights, including rights to such basic necessities as food, health care, and education. Women may have little say in managing their own bodies or personal lives. They may be unable to determine how many children to have or when to have them. Poverty, illiteracy, poor nutrition, ill health, too many children at too close intervals—all these, added to social conditioning, result in women's suffering from low self esteem, with little awareness that they could make decisions in matters concerning their own lives. Lacking the opportunity to make choices on a daily basis, it is hardly any wonder that such women do not participate in public and political life

1/2



The World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) is a global network of individuals and organisations concerned with the protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding worldwide based on the Innocenti Declaration, the Ten Links for Nurturing the Future and the WHO/UNICEF Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding. Its core partners are International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN), La Leche League International (LLL), International Lactation Consultant Association (ILCA), Wellstart International, Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine (ABM) and LINKAGES. WABA is in consultative status with UNICEF and an NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC) | WABA, PO Box 1200, 10850 Penang, Malaysia | Tel: 60-4-6584 816 | Fax: 60-4-6572 655 | Email: waba@streamyx.com | Website: www.waba.org.my

The gender roles that a culture assigns to women affect their ability to decide how to use their own time and energy. Indeed, many women cannot even make decisions about what to feed their infants. They do not have access to information, for instance on the benefits and management of breastfeeding, and are easily misled by baby milk companies trying to convince them that their own milk is valueless or inferior to artificial milks. Many times in each 24-hour day, the mother of an infant or young child makes a decision whether to give the breast, or to care for herself and her child in some other way. In an enabling environment that respects her decision to breastfeed, she is free to make that choice based on her needs and her child's needs. But all too often a woman's decision to breastfeed is derailed by economic necessity that forces her to take up a job with no maternity protection—no paid maternity leave, no breastfeeding breaks at work, no job protection. Even where maternity legislation exists, it may not be properly implemented.

Breastfeeding seems like a private activity, yet during the months or years when women are lactating (producing milk) they can and should fulfill a variety of public roles in addition to their role as mother. The civic decision-making process must be open to women and men with family responsibilities. Child care facilities would make it possible for people with young children to participate more fully in decision-making, and quiet babies in arms should be welcomed with their parents. The voices of women who breastfeed should be heard everywhere—in committee rooms and board rooms, in union halls, in parliaments, in town meetings, at debates and rallies. Breastfeeding must not be permitted to be an excuse for systematically excluding women from the important policy discussions that affect all of our lives.

For more information, kindly contact:

Sarah Amin
Co-Director, WABA
Email: waba@streamyx.com
Tel. No. : 604-6584816

Chris Mulford
Co-coordinator
Women and Work Task Force
Email : waba@streamyx.com
Tel. No. 604-4816

2/2



*The World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) is a global network of individuals and organisations concerned with the protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding worldwide based on the Innocenti Declaration, the Ten Links for Nurturing the Future and the WHO/UNICEF Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding. Its core partners are International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN), La Leche League International (LLL), International Lactation Consultant Association (ILCA), Wellstart International, Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine (ABM) and LINKAGES. WABA is in consultative status with UNICEF and an NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC) * WABA, PO Box 1200, 10850 Penang, Malaysia * Tel: 60-4-6584 816 * Fax: 60-4-6572 655* Email: waba@streamyx.com * Website: www.waba.org.my*

