

Maternity protection – still a corner stone of decent work! International Labour Day - 1 May 2012

In the wake of the global financial crisis and deteriorations of social protection, the World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) declares once again our solidarity with working women all over the world, and especially women who are pregnant, and with young children; in other words, all women who seek to manage their dual roles of being mother and worker. Unfortunately, these roles are inadequately supported at many levels of society despite having international maternity protection instruments and national laws that are relatively favourable.

During the period of reproduction¹ women are vulnerable and need special protection to meet their changing physical needs: ante- and post-natal medical visits, nutritious foods, breastfeeding counselling, rest periods, as well as specific health protection at the workplace, including during breastfeeding... During this same period, other measures are also needed: time off to give birth and rest before and afterwards, decent payment during these leave periods, assurance of same or equivalent employment upon return from maternity leave, a non-discriminatory attitude towards the employment of women of reproductive age, time off to breastfeed their child daily at the workplace.

WABA and its member organisations² have campaigned since the 1990s for stronger maternity protection legislation and were closely involved in the process leading to the most recent ILO Convention on Maternity Protection (C183, 2000). We aim for stronger national legislation in line with international standards and greater awareness of such rights among working women. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has recently launched a Resource Package for all stakeholders wanting to act on strengthening maternity protection at work [Maternity Protection Resource Package. *From Aspiration to Reality for All*. <http://www.ilo.org/travail/lang--en/index.htm>). WABA's Maternity Protection kit (<http://www.waba.org.my/whatwedo/womenandwork/mpckit.htm>) also promotes similar core elements. The key maternity protection elements are:

- Legislation for all working women, particularly those in the informal economy and those working in agriculture and as domestics;
- Paid leave of at least 18 weeks as recommended by the ILO with a period of compulsory leave of 6 weeks *after* birth – and if possible, of 4 weeks *before* birth. However, for optimal exclusive breastfeeding of 6 months, WABA calls for paid maternity leave of 24 weeks!
- Cash and medical benefits related to the whole maternity period to be provided by the State;
- Health protection for the pregnant women, the mother and the baby at the workplace in case of dangerous or potentially dangerous work.
- Return to the same or equivalent job at the end of maternity leave with no loss of pay or of other benefits;
- No dismissal during the whole maternity period;
- No form of discrimination in or during employment of women in reproductive age;
- Daily paid breastfeeding breaks of at least two 30-minutes periods (or shorter workdays);
- Breastfeeding facilities at the workplace;
- Family-/baby-/child-friendly policies at the workplace for work and family balance.

On this occasion, WABA also commemorates the late Chris Mulford, co-coordinator of the WABA Women and Work Task Force, who died in the summer of 2011. As a lactation consultant and staunch breastfeeding advocate, Chris fought to protect and to help working women to breastfeed. May our collective and continued strife for better conditions for working mothers enable ALL women around the world to balance their productive and reproductive roles!



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 Declarations, 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 and Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine (ABM). 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: wba@waba.org.my | Website: www.worldbreastfeedingweek.org and www.waba.org.my

¹ The maternity period includes pregnancy, labour/delivery and breastfeeding;

² WABA, IBFAN, ILCA and Linkages.