

## Press Release

### WABA International Labour Day Statement

1 May 2014



World Alliance for  
Breastfeeding Action

## Simple measures can help to narrow widening gender gap in employment

The gender gap in employment has widened during the Global Economic Crisis. In April 2014 Guy Rider, the ILO Director-General is quoted as saying *"Inequalities have widened and the wage share in GDP fallen in many countries, including the world's largest economies and female participation rates lag those of males in all countries."*

During an economic downturn, women are frequently forced to accept lesser work and lower pay in order to meet household needs. Furthermore, most governments have adopted tighter fiscal measures and cut back on public spending, especially on social programmes, which in turn has a disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable groups of women. Women's employment is often informal and is without legally regulated social protection.

Women workers who are pregnant or breastfeeding are in need of special consideration and this has been recognised by the international community in the form of the *ILO Maternity Protection Convention C-183(2000)* and its *Recommendation R-191(2000)* that provide a minimum standard of protection for working mothers during pregnancy, childbirth and the post-partum period .

In a message at World Breastfeeding Week 2013, Laura Addati, ILO specialist on Maternity Protection said, *"Combining work and breastfeeding is not only possible but also essential for both mother and child, as well as for business and society...Global efforts to promote breastfeeding in the workplace are starting to pay off, with more than 65 per cent of countries around the world now having some sort of legislation entitling mothers to either remunerated nursing breaks or a daily reduction of working hours."*

Women have a crucial role to play in the development of healthy families, communities and countries. The UN Millennium Development Goals laid out ambitious targets to be reached by 2015 including the reduction in child mortality rates and the improvement of maternal health.

Adequate maternity protection in the workplace is a vital part of gender equality that in turn, is fundamental to human progress and development. For example, in 2008, a new target on gender equality was added to the ambition to eradicate poverty and hunger.

Every woman has the right to balance her productive and reproductive work without having to sacrifice one for the other.

However, it is of concern that only 28 countries have ratified the *ILO Maternity Protection Convention C-183 of 2000*, after over a decade.

WABA calls on all governments to ratify *C183 (2000)* and adopt *Recommendation 191(2000)*.

In addition, WABA recommends governments to also ratify *C-189(2011) on Domestic Workers* and *C-184(2001) on Safety and Health in Agriculture* to increase the scope of working women covered by protective measures, considering that most women work in the informal economy and have little, if any, maternity protection.

In countries where women only have a period of maternity leave, but not the full scope of maternity benefits, there are measures that responsible employers can take to support a breastfeeding working mother. In many countries, employers have taken initiatives to provide facilities for breastfeeding mothers, thus making it easier for them to combine mothering with paid employment.

Enlightened employers are willing to wholeheartedly embrace family friendly policies and in the knowledge that this benefits not only employee and employer, but has wider positive effects on society. Simple measures such as providing a lactation room, breastfeeding breaks and flexible working hours for breastfeeding mothers, go a long way towards creating family-friendly work environments.

For more information concerning the rights to maternity protection, please see:

1. ILO Resource Package: *Maternity Protection Resource Package. From Aspiration to Reality for All. 22 Nov 2012.*
2. *WABA Maternity Protection Campaign Kit – A breastfeeding perspective*

For more information, please contact:

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**World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA)** is a global network of individuals & organisations concerned with the protection, promotion & support of breastfeeding worldwide. WABA action is based on the Innocenti Declaration, the Ten Links for Nurturing the Future and the Global Strategy for Infant & 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 & an NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC).

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