



*International Baby Food Action Network  
Red internacional de grupos pro alimentación infantil  
Réseau international des groupes d'action pour l'alimentation infantile*

**1998 RECIPIENT OF THE RIGHT LIVELIHOOD AWARD**

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**Oral Statement – CRC Day of General Discussion 2014**  
**Digital Media and children's rights**

Thank you Madame Chair. I represent IBFAN, the International Baby Food Action Network, and I would like to raise your awareness about the way infants and young children's right to health is violated through digital media.

As you may already know, breastfeeding is recognized as a crucial intervention to ensure a healthy start in life for infants and young children. It is the single most effective intervention for saving lives. Unfortunately, more than 60% of babies are not enabled to follow optimal breastfeeding practices. One important challenge breastfeeding faces is aggressive marketing of breastmilk substitutes. To protect breastfeeding against such marketing, the WHA has adopted the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes, which your Committee has integrated last year into its General Comments No 15 and 16. However, Code violations are still widespread. Moreover, misleading marketing of breastmilk substitutes through digital media is a growing trend that has taken considerable proportions in the recent years.

Despite the article 5 of the Code, which prohibits baby food companies to advertise and promote their products to the general public, baby food companies are increasingly using social media as well as mobile and web-based technologies to interact directly with pregnant women and mothers. Participative websites, blogs, mobile applications and "mothers clubs" offer parents "nutritional advices" on pregnancy and infant and young child feeding through chats or hotlines. These strategies to reach mothers lead to creation amongst parents of a brand loyalty, a corporate culture in which industrial feeding is the norm. In addition, when entering these corporate "clubs", parents often receive free samples, promotional offers and invitations to try products, another set of marketing practices prohibited by the Code.

IBFAN is also very concerned by the so-called development of "viral marketing", when attractive video clips, often claiming that industrial baby foods have positive effects on babies' health, are published by companies on YouTube and social media, getting then picked up by users who share them widely. Recently, a Nestlé video clip, supposedly promoting breastfeeding, but subtly promoting breastmilk substitutes, was viewed more than a million times on YouTube. Last but not least, companies are increasingly engaging in 'image transfer' public relations activities. The global campaign launched by UNICEF and WHO to improve health and development through adequate nutrition during the first 1000 days from conception is one such case. Both Nestlé and Danone, leading companies in the baby food sector, have co-opted this slogan and launched their own commercial campaigns on these first 1000 days.

Despite this confusing situation, appropriate roles of different actors have clearly been defined in the Global Strategy on Infant and Young Child Feeding: companies have the obligation to comply with the Code in all contexts while States have the duty to protect, promote and support breastfeeding. Therefore, States should be urged to fully implement the International Code into their national legislation, ensure its effective monitoring, implement deterrent sanctions against violations, launch modern and attractive digital campaigns on breastfeeding promotion and support, and implement their Extraterritorial Obligations.

Through these actions, breastfeeding could be duly protected at a global scale and thus, the right to health of every newborn and young child upheld. Thank you for your attention.