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International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN)

Meeting:

Executive Board 136

Agenda Item:

7.2.2 Climate and health: outcome of the WHO Conference on Health and Climate

Statement:

On behalf the global network IBFAN, working to protect promote and support breastfeeding and infant and young child feeding, we thank WHO for this report. Raising awareness of the links between health and climate is crucial, as are policies that not only mitigate the impact but reduce the increase in climate change. In this context protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding and the use of local, bio-diverse and culturally appropriate family foods is key. There is no food more locally produced or sustainable than breastmilk. Low carbon and green, breastfeeding uses none of the planet's scarce natural resources or raw materials. In 2009, the Lancet reported that while breastfeeding is a thoroughly eco-friendly feeding practice, the carbon footprint created by the formula milk industry from sourcing, producing and packaging is massive. Neither industrially manufactured nor ultra-processed, breastmilk is a valuable natural resource in its own right, yet one under threat from the ever-expanding market for commercial baby foods, as highlighted in the IBFAN publication Formula for Disaster. According to market analysts, the market for formula and packaged baby food is set to more than double. What will be the impact on our planet if the practice of breastfeeding keeps declining? Currently, out of the 136.7 million babies born annually, less than half of infants worldwide are exclusively breastfed for the first six months. Every baby who is not breastfed is an additional baby who will receive formula. The planned expansion of the baby food market will affect both infant health and the environment.

We urge Member States and the WHO secretariat to ensure that interventions and regulations to protect, promote and support optimal breastfeeding practices and local family foods are placed higher on the health agenda. We need to do more to protect the future of our children and grandchildren.