



International Baby Food Action Network - IBFAN

Geneva Infant Feeding Association - GIFA

1998 Recipient of the Right Livelihood Award



PRESS RELEASE

Nestlé bottled water dropped from EXPO 2015 in Milan following protests

18 December 2014

The International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN) welcomes the decision of the Swiss government to modify its plans to promote Nestlé's brand image at the Swiss pavilion at the next Universal Exhibition - EXPO 2015 in Milan, Italy. ⁱ IBFAN was one of several NGOs which raised concerns about the promotion of bottled water.

The original plan was to distribute free bottles of Nestlé water from one of the four giant towers at the Swiss pavilion. The 15-metre high towers or silos would each have been filled with a Swiss product, supposed to symbolise the values of responsibility, sustainability, innovation and tradition conveyed by Switzerland. However, Nestlé bottled water represents none of these. It is neither sustainable, nor responsible, nor innovative - nor even a Swiss tradition.

Following questions from Swiss parliamentarians and a series of letters sent to the director of Presence Switzerland, the government body responsible for the image of Switzerland abroad, substantial changes have been made. Now, instead of bottles of Nestlé water, the tower will contain empty plastic cups which visitors will fill from taps with water from local aquifers. The cups will carry messages about the importance of sustainable water management: once the cups in the tower are emptied they will only be replaced very slowly, to raise awareness that water is a valuable but limited natural resource, to be shared and used responsibly. Instead of product promotion, the installation will encourage the public to take part in a comprehensive debate on the importance of access to and responsible management of water. Indeed, water is a precious public resource and access to safe, sufficient and affordable water constitutes a human right and is a prerequisite for the realization of all other human rights.

The change of plan is the result of international pressure on the Swiss government and Parliament through letters from a group of NGOs in Switzerland, Canada, France, Italy and the United Kingdom. ⁱⁱ This effort has been acknowledged by Fred Buluku, representative of the Kenya County Government Workers Union and human rights activist, who pointed out the need to

raise awareness at global level on the advantages of tap water, which is safe and healthier than bottled water.ⁱⁱⁱ

The NGOs' letters highlighted the potential damage to Switzerland's worldwide reputation as a champion of sustainable development and responsible management of natural resources. Switzerland's international image is one of pure mountain air and a clean environment – with water coming straight from the snowy Alps. Aligned with this idyllic picture, many Swiss cantons and cities have launched campaigns to inform citizens that tap water is pure, good for health and sustainable, as it needs no packaging or transport, unlike bottled water which places a heavy burden on the environment.^{iv} As an example, the City of Geneva promotes its very own water under the name « Eau de Genève », reminiscent of French perfume, or « Château la Pompe », recalling expensive French wine.

But it will take more than catchy slogans to beat the bottled water barons. It is an uphill struggle to counter the intensive promotion of bottled water by Nestlé and other companies. We must maintain public pressure on our authorities in every country to provide safe and clean water for all. The decision of the Swiss government is certainly a step in the right direction, but EXPO 2015 in Milan may still become just one more huge trade fair to promote commercial opportunities – with sustainability and responsibility relegated to the background.

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ⁱ The announcement was made at a press conference at the residence of the Italian Ambassador in Berne on December 9th 2014, by Ambassador Nicolas Bideau, the Director of Presence Switzerland, the government body responsible for the image of Switzerland abroad in the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Swiss Confederation. The theme of EXPO 2015 is « Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life » and it emphasises sustainable development and responsible food production.

ⁱⁱ IBFAN offices Baby Milk Action and IBFAN-GIFA, together with other Civil Society Organisations, took an active part in the campaign and sent letters to Swiss officials noting that promotion of bottled water runs counter to the theme of EXPO 2015, which is « Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life » and emphasises sustainable development and responsible food production :

- <http://www.babymilkaction.org/archives/2737> (on Baby Milk Action website)
- <http://www.gifa.org/ibfan-gifa-se-joint-aux-critiques-contre-la-participation-de-nestle-a-lexpo2015-sous-la-banniere-de-presence-suisse/> (on IBFAN-GIFA website, with an explanation in French)

ⁱⁱⁱ See Fred Buluku's comment on the article 'Nestlé Water Turned into Cups at Milan Expo' : <http://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/nestl%C3%A9-water-turned-into-cups-at-milan-expo/41159842>

^{iv} Bottled water contributes to greenhouse gas emissions and pollution caused by the transportation of heavy bottles and produces waste from all the plastic packaging, which is often not biodegradable.

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RELATED PRESS LINKS

In English:

<http://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/nestlé-water-turned-into-cups-at-milan-expo/41159842>

In German:

<http://www.nzz.ch/wirtschaft/newsticker/expo-2015-wasserhaehne-statt-nestle-flaschen-am-schweizer-auftritt-1.18441199>

<http://www.tagesanzeiger.ch/leben/gesellschaft/NestleFlaschen-fliegen-bei-der-Expo-raus/story/13712557>

<http://www.nzz.ch/schweiz/expo-turm-offeriert-leitungswasser-1.18441403>

In French:

<http://www.lematin.ch/suisse/Une-Suisse-solidaire-et-responsable-a-l-Expo-de-Milan/story/14962346>

<http://www.rts.ch/info/suisse/6367366-le-pavillon-suisse-pour-l-expo-universelle-de-milan-subit-des-changements-de-taille.html>

<http://www.24heures.ch/suisse/suisse-servira-eau-robinet/story/29765753>

http://www.letemps.ch/Page/Uuid/307393cc-7fc3-11e4-9a92-1e037d8e04b7/Pour_lExpo_2015_la_Suisse_freine_son_audace

In Italian:

<http://www.swissinfo.ch/ita/la-svizzera-svela-il-suo-menu-per-expo-2015/41159174>