



**World Alliance for
Breastfeeding Action**

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To

Dr Margaret Chan, Director General, WHO, Geneva
Ms Ann Veneman, Executive Director, UNICEF NY

Re: Concerns about conflict of interest

We are writing to express the concern of the World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action and its Core partners, with 53 experts from 24 countries, attending the workshop on *“Protecting Promoting and Supporting Breastfeeding from 6-24 months: Issues, Politics, Policies and Action”* in Penang, Malaysia, to discuss how to support continued breastfeeding and appropriate complementary feeding.

The *International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes* and subsequent relevant World Health Assembly Resolutions, and national regulations, protect mothers and children from any commercial influence that undermines optimal infant and young child feeding practices. We appreciate the role that WHO and UNICEF have played in upholding these policies since 1981.

However, we are deeply concerned that the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) is participating in the meeting on *Strengthening Actions to Improve infant feeding in children 6-23 months of age*, taking place in Geneva right now. They are thus in a position to influence the policy directions of WHO and UNICEF.

The Board of GAIN includes among other food giants, a manufacturer of breastmilk substitutes, DANONE, that systematically violates the *International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes*. The WHO/UNICEF partnership with GAIN constitutes a conflict of interest and is in contradiction with WHO's own *Guidelines on Interaction with Commercial Enterprises to Achieve Health Outcomes*, with Paragraph 44 of the *Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding*, and with WHA Resolutions 49.15 (1996), 58.32 (2005) and 61.20 (2008).

The presence of GAIN in such a meeting legitimises its declared aim to build markets for the commercial sector in the developing world especially for commercial foods for infants and young children. We understand that GAIN will have signed the declaration of interests of WHO experts. We expect WHO and UNICEF to safeguard their independence and take care to avoid conflict of interest, in any joint collaboration with such parties, ensuring that their policies and implementation strategies are based on the health needs of the population rather than on the interests of their partners.

We respectfully call on WHO and UNICEF to immediately reconsider their partnership with GAIN, and other similar organisations having conflicts of interest, in the interests of protection of women and infant and young child health, nutrition, survival and development.

We are confident that WHO and UNICEF will refrain from continuing partnerships that undermine their independence and objectivity.

Yours sincerely,



Dr. Felicity Savage, Chair of WABA

On behalf of:

WABA Core partners

Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine

International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN)

International Lactation Consultant Association (ILCA)

La Leche League International

Wellstart International

Other member organisations

Health Education to Villages

Quebec Lactation Consultant Association, Canada

Cameroon Link

Citizens International, Malaysia

International Code Documentation Centre

Geneva Infant Feeding Association

Breastfeeding Promotion Network of India

Arugaan, The Philippines

CEFEMINA, Costa Rica

Baby Milk Action, UK

Training and Education on Ecology and Health, Mexico

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