



# communiqué

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## INTERNATIONAL CODE OF MARKETING OF BREASTMILK SUBSTITUTES ADOPTED WITH CANADIAN SUPPORT

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The Department of External Affairs and Health and Welfare Canada welcome the adoption May 20 in Geneva by the Thirty-Fourth World Health Assembly of an International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes. Canada was one of the 118 countries which voted in favour of this important recommendation.

The Canadian delegate to the Assembly, Dr. Maureen Law, expressed Canada's support for the Code in a statement to the Assembly on May 20 as follows:

Mr. Chairman,

There is no doubt that a mother's milk is best for her infant. The superiority of breastmilk--psychologically, nutritionally, immunologically--is indisputable. Hence breastfeeding must be encouraged and protected as one of the measures essential to the very survival of many infants and desirable for the healthy development of all the world's children.

In Canada, progress in promoting breastfeeding has been encouraging. Federal and provincial health authorities have for some time now been working in conjunction with professional and other non-governmental organizations in the development and implementation of breastfeeding promotion

programmes. The results indicate that the percentage of infants being breastfed has, during the last ten years, increased nationally from a low of about 40 per cent to nearly 60 per cent.

These Canadian programmes are consistent with the general thrust of the Code and contain some of the measures outlined in the Code. The free distribution of samples, for example, has already been discontinued in some hospitals of Canada, and continued progress is anticipated. Health authorities are also undertaking increased responsibility for the education of mothers and prospective mothers, with regard to breastfeeding.

It is on the basis of this national experience -- and of our belief that the needs of infants everywhere require our concerted and collective efforts -- that we support the aims of the Draft Code and its adoption as it has been developed to date. However, in order to achieve its earliest intended impact, the Code must find broadest possible acceptance amongst World Health Organization members. It must allow governments to give effect to its provisions in accordance with their respective socio-economic and cultural situations. We believe that the Code in the form of a recommendation would achieve these objectives.

We would like to emphasize that the World Health Organization has a crucial role to play in assisting requesting governments with the development of their respective approaches to the implementation of the Code. We must note, however, that because of the particular socio-economic and cultural characteristics of our society -- as also reflected in federal and provincial legislation -- Canadian health authorities may encounter fundamental difficulties in their efforts to give full effect to all the provisions embodied by the Draft Code. Nevertheless, we expect the Code to have a stimulating effect in the further development of programmes in this area as appropriate to our national condition.

Mr. Chairman, despite the various national approaches which will no doubt develop in response to the Code, we wish to emphasize the urgency and importance of a concerted effort on the part of all of us -- whether from

government, industry, non-governmental organizations or general public -- in order to achieve the essential aims of the Code in a rational manner. We hope that when we come to review the progress made, in two years' time -- as stipulated in EB67.R11 -- that the effectiveness of this collaborative effort will be clearly demonstrable. However, we wish to stress the need for the Secretariat and the Executive Board to develop clear definitions of the criteria to be used in this evaluation process and to develop an effective monitoring system--including assistance to requesting governments in developing and implementing their own monitoring activities.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, we recall that the Code is only one aspect of the comprehensive effort required by all of us to ensure that as many infants as possible -- in every country of the world -- experience the benefits of breast-feeding.