



**International Women's Day**  
**Press statement**  
**For Immediate Release**

5 March 2010

**EQUAL RIGHTS, EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES: PROGRESS FOR ALL**

International Women's Day (IWD) each year is an opportunity for women globally to raise their voices, awareness of injustices by gender and to observe and share achievements and progress towards equal rights and opportunities for women and the girl child. IBFAN Africa (the International Baby Food action Network) joins the rest of the world in commemorating the International Women's Day; To support Equal Rights, Equal Opportunities and Progress for All through its commitment to the improvement of mother and child health. Our mandate globally is to promote, *protect and support breastfeeding as a right for both mother and child.*

All women including the most vulnerable, pregnant and lactating mothers have rights that need to be supported and respected by all as we seek progress for all citizens. Women are often faced with challenges brought upon them as they try to juggle both their productive (work, paid and non-paid) and their reproductive work (childbearing, breastfeeding and caring).. These are important aspects of women's lives but they often take on a disproportionate share of this work compared to their male partners. While breastfeeding is unique to women, they require support and recognition for this important contribution to society. Hence social equity measures such as the ILO Convention 183 (2000) on Maternity Protection which recommends a minimum entitlement of 14 weeks paid maternity leave for all working women including those in atypical forms of work, needs to be adopted and ratified by Member States as a matter of urgency. Furthermore, this Convention and recommendations provide for medical care, job protection as well as breastfeeding breaks when the woman returns to work. To date twenty seven out of about fifty countries in Africa are still providing far less than the minimum 14 weeks maternity leave. Most of those providing this recommended minimum period only do so for those employed by the Public Sector and the majority of those in the private as well as the informal sector are at the mercy of their employers! IBFAN is calling for a change in policies to support working women to enable them to fulfill their productive and reproductive roles. Fathers too well have a right to care, nurture and bond with their infants and in some countries such as Kenya, paternity leave has already been enacted; this therefore allows both parents to share the responsibility of caring for their children on an equal basis. Such

equitable measures would help both women and men to balance work and family life, with positive outcomes of increasing the female employment rate and ensuring healthier families and communities.

IBFAN Africa advocates for optimal infant feeding practices which includes the promotion, protection and support of exclusive breastfeeding for six months; continued breastfeeding up to two years or more and timely complementary feeding when the baby is between six to nine months. So in order for governments to implement these global recommendations, the need to harmonise them with the labour regulations cannot be over emphasized. This will enable working women to exercise their right to give the best nourishment to their babies

IBFAN Africa takes this opportunity to call all governments that are challenged by the implementation of these recommendations to act now and put policies in place which encourage more equal sharing of family responsibilities between men and women. Ratification of *ILO Convention 183* on Maternity Protection will be an important landmark in the fight for the rights of working women who also want to ensure the best for their children.

Breastfeeding is a unique process that provides ideal nutrition for infants and contributes to their healthy growth and development. It reduces the incidence and severity of infectious diseases, thereby lowering infant morbidity and mortality. It further provides social and economic benefits to the family and the nation. IBFAN Africa and all its partners urge governments to revisit the commitments and declarations they made at various times in the past as their implementation would certainly be another building block in our efforts of developing a more equitable society!

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