



**International Baby Food Action Network - IBFAN**  
Red internacional de grupos pro alimentación infantil  
Réseau international des groupes d'action pour l'alimentation  
infantile

**Geneva Infant Feeding Association - GIFA**  
**1998 Recipient of the Right Livelihood Award**



Geneva, 7 February 2012

Dear Economist,

At the **Feeding the World Summit** that will take place in Geneva on 8 February, senior executives from 25 countries will discuss the world food challenges and influence policies and practices of the future.

The issues at stake are of high importance and it is crucial that this debate takes place in a democratic environment, free from influence of vested interests. Therefore we note with concern the participation of Nestlé and other food and beverages industries as partners and sponsors of this conference. We also note the lack of participation of key international public interest NGOs involved in global food and nutrition. We list the reasons for our concerns below:

**1. Sponsorship of the event by a company with a record of human rights violations.**

Breastfeeding and infant and young child feeding practices are far from international recommendations everywhere in the world. This results in unacceptable levels in infant and child mortality and higher morbidity. Commercial pressures and marketing strategies of baby food companies contribute to this dire situation.

Our organisation, IBFAN<sup>1</sup>, strives to ensure compliance of infant food manufacturers with the 1981 International Code of Marketing of Breast-Milk Substitutes and subsequent relevant World Health Assembly Resolutions. Implementation of the Code is recognized by the Committee on the Rights of the Child as a concrete measure towards the child's right to the highest attainable standard of health. IBFAN's 2010 global monitoring report shows that companies continue compromising child health through unethical promotion of their products, such as marketing campaigns on added ingredients with no proven benefits. As the former Executive Director of UNICEF, Stephen Lewis put it: *"Those that make claims about infant formula that intentionally undermine women's confidence in breastfeeding are not to be regarded as clever entrepreneurs just doing their job but as human rights violators of the worst kind."* Nestlé remains the biggest violator of the Code, and yet is allowed to sponsor your conference.

**2. Sponsorship by food and beverages industry raises ethical issues of conflicts of interest.**

In order to promote their products, baby food companies influence health workers through sponsorship and grants to individuals. This practice creates an inadmissible conflict of interest and is forbidden by the article 7.3 of the Code. Similarly, a conference that is to seek solutions to and provide guidance on the world food and nutrition related challenges, if sponsored by food and beverage industries with direct interest in the outcome, such as Nestlé, represents a situation of conflicts of interest that could well

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<sup>1</sup> The International Baby Food Action Network is a grassroots network of more than 250 groups worldwide working to protect, promote and support optimal infant and young child feeding. [www.ibfan.org](http://www.ibfan.org)

undermine the proceedings and outcome of the entire event. One can question the conference's conclusions, in the same way that one would question the pill prescribed by a doctor sponsored by pharma that produces the pill.

**3. The increased acceptance of participation of industries in policy shaping and setting forums.**

If industry is accepted under a monochrome positive light, as a "partner" to intergovernmental organisations, initiatives and other fora, it leads to blurring of lines between public and private and their legitimate roles in development. It distracts attention from the fact that industry is often at the root of the problems the international community is trying to address. Moreover, it fosters promotion of market-based solution to food and nutrition, while little or no attention is given to strategies that strengthen accountability mechanisms and facilitate sustainable local solutions to adequate food.

We hope we made an appealing argument which you will be able to take into consideration for any future conferences and perhaps still try to limit any negative effects that the sponsorship of the current event might cause.

We would appreciate it, if this comment could be published in the "Letters to the editor" section of your weekly magazine.

Sincerely,

Lida Lhotska  
European Coordinator  
IBFAN-GIFA

Ina Verzivolli  
Human Rights Officer  
IBFAN-GIFA

Maryse Arendt  
Director  
Initiativ Liewensufank

Cc:

Matthew Bishop, New York Bureau Chief, The Economist

Dougal Thomson, Head of Conference Programmes CEMEA, The Economist Group



The International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN) is a 1998 Right Livelihood Award recipient. ([www.ibfan.org](http://www.ibfan.org)) It consists of more than 250 public interest groups working together around the world to save lives of infants and young children and bring lasting change in infant feeding practices at all levels. IBFAN aims to promote the health and well-being of infants and young children and their mothers through protection, promotion and support of optimal breastfeeding and infant and young child feeding practices. IBFAN works for the universal and full implementation of *International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitute and subsequent relevant World Health Assembly (WHA) resolutions.*