INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF INFANT FOOD INDUSTRIES
(ICIFI)

SUMMARY POSITION STATEMENT RE PROPOSED WHO INTERNATIONAL
CODE FOR THE MARKETING OF BREAST MILK SUBSTITUTES

ICIFI Member companies, representing 85% of infant formula sales in the developing
countries, acknowledge that breast feeding is the best and safest method of feeding
a baby during the first months of life.

The marketing practices of ICIFI member companies are selective, educationally orientated
and designed to avoid discouraging breast feeding (ICIFI Charter).

While breast feeding is recommended in all societies and extended breast feeding is the
norm in developing countries, some mothers are unable to breast feed, and many more need
to supplement breast feeding early. Breast feeding is increasing in many industrialized
countries, and where mothers in these countries choose not to breast feed or stop breast
feeding early, it is mainly socio-economic factors, including career resumption or other
personal preferences, that influence this choice. It is the mother's right to make this
choice, based on professional advice if possible, and objective information about the
advantages of breast feeding and alternative feeding methods.

Thus, there is a legitimate and substantial need for infant formula (breast milk substitu-
tes and supplements of high nutritional quality) throughout the world. This need is
often far from being satisfied, particularly in the developing countries where indigenous
substitutes of inadequate nutritional and hygienic quality are the normal foods given to
replace or to supplement breast milk. Industry has a responsibility to fulfill this need
and to provide appropriate education to ensure proper use.

Extremist critics of the infant food industry have sought to minimize this need by a de-
liberate campaign of misinformation that ignores socio-economic and nutritional realities.
The so-called Breast vs. Bottle controversy is based on the erroneous propositions that
breast feeding and formula feeding are mutually exclusive alternatives, and that industry
marketing practices are designed to compete with breast feeding. Hence current attempts
to impose a detailed and unnecessarily restrictive code, which prohibits essential educa-
tional programmes, disrupts the professional relationship between industry and the Health
Professions, and applies to all countries regardless of their economic, cultural, or
political differences, would be counter-productive, if the aim is to ensure safe and
adequate nutrition for children everywhere.
Against this background and based on the consultations with health professionals
and government officials, ICIFi Members position on the proposed WHO Code is
therefore as follows:

1. ICIFi endorses the basic principle agreed at the WHO/UNICEF meeting in
October 1979 that infant formula marketing should be designed to ensure
safe and adequate nutrition for infants without discouraging breast feeding.

2. ICIFi supports the concept of a realistic and relevant international code
of general principles based on objective factors related to improved child
health which provides the framework for appropriate national measures to meet
specific national needs.

3. Throughout the WHO/UNICEF consultation process, ICIFi has criticized the form
and content of the successive code drafts which were found to contain unac-
ceptable provisions being too detailed, counter productive, and in parts,
incompatible with the constitutional requirements of a number of countries.

4. ICIFi has consistently offered constructive proposals for modification of the
Code to bring it in line with the spirit of the October 1979 meeting and to
remove unworkable and unrealistic provisions.

5. Whilst some of ICIFi's proposals are reflected in the preamble and aim of
the fourth draft code, many substantive points in the detailed provisions
contain the same defects criticized during the consultation period. The
4th Draft Code does not fulfill the criteria referred to in (2) above.

6. ICIFi believes that the translation of any proposed code into relevant
national measures will be possible only if governments have the necessary
flexibility in adapting individual provisions of the Code to their own needs,
given the wide variations in social, cultural, economic and political situ-
ations of different countries.

7. ICIFi will continue to co-operate with Governments in meeting their national
requirements, which differ, of course, in each sovereign state.

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Address: P. O. B. 328, CH-8035 Zurich, Switzerland
Nordstrasse 15
Telephone: Zurich 01/363 10 30
Telex: 52872 chimi ch