

Photo opportunity – 11:00 am, 8 December 2006, London

Baby Milk Action delivers messages of support for Philippines stand against aggressive baby food marketing



Baby Milk Action is a non-profit organisation which aims to save lives and protect infant and young child health through independent controls on babyfood marketing.

We are a member of the International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN), a network of over 200 citizens groups in more than 100 countries.

www.babymilkaction.org

www.ibfan.org

Baby Milk Action will be carrying messages from individuals, celebrities and organisations from around the world in a card of support to the Philippines Ambassador in London at 11:00 am on 8 December. The former Bishop of Coventry will be attending.

US and Swiss baby food companies have taken the Philippines Ministry of Health to the Supreme Court over regulations introduced to implement World Health Assembly standards on the marketing of baby foods. In August the US Chamber of Commerce wrote to President Arroyo saying that investment in the Philippines was under threat and calling for her to interfere in the court case. Four days later the Supreme Court reversed an earlier decision and suspended the regulations.

Emma Thompson, one of the celebrities who has sent a message of support in the card, said:

“I’m appalled to hear about this attack on the Philippine Department of Health’s courageous action. Surely every government has the right to regulate the marketing of baby foods as they see fit. The impact on health of aggressive marketing is well established and is something I’ve been personally concerned about for years. I’m sending my message of support to the people of the Philippines saying people around the world are with you and urge you to stand up to this outrageous pressure.”

In November Baby Milk Action launched an international solidarity campaign. People and organisations around the world have sent messages telling the government and campaigners in the Philippines that they have support in protecting their infants. The launch coincided with Baby Milk Action’s Policy Director, Patti Rundall OBE, visiting the Philippines and speaking on television, radio and at Congress. The international campaign has now generated front-page stories in the Philippines media, which is sometimes reluctant to report critically on transnational corporations, which are major advertisers.

According to the World Health Organisation 16,000 infants die before their fifth birthday in the Philippines due to inappropriate feeding. The World Health Assembly introduced *the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes* in 1981 and subsequent, relevant Resolutions to protect breastfeeding and to ensure breastmilk substitutes are used safely if necessary. WHO has stated that 1.5 million infants die around the world every year because they are not adequately breastfed.

The Philippines Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) were signed off by the Secretary of State for Health in May 2006. However, the Regulations were soon challenged in court by the Pharmaceutical and Health Care Association of the Philippines (PHAP) representing three main US formula companies (Abbott Ross, Mead Johnson and Wyeth), Gerber (now owned by Swiss NOVARTIS, but possibly transferring to Nestlé) and other international pharmaceutical giants. Nestlé is claiming it is supporting the regulations, but in reality is opposing key provisions.

The messages of support and card will be delivered to Ambassador Edgardo B. Espiritu at 11:00 am on 8 December at the Philippine Embassy, 9-a Palace Green, London, W8 4QE. Patti Rundall will be accompanied by supporters including former Bishop of Coventry, Simon Barrington-Ward (quote on pg 2)

For further information see www.babymilkaction.org or call Patti Rundall on 07786 523493 or Mike Brady on 020 8816 8210. Email: mikebrady@babymilkaction.org

For messages of support see the on-line version of this press release at <http://www.babymilkaction.org/press/press8dec06.html> - including: Oxfam GB, National Childbirth Trust, Zôe Wanamaker, Emma Thompson, Gleny Kinnock MEP and many more.

Former Bishop of Coventry, Simon Barrington-Ward, message of support says:

"I wholeheartedly support the campaign against the disgraceful action of companies and the understandable but utterly regrettable decision of the Philippine Supreme Court which, in the face of the appalling power of these companies, has allowed them to stop the Department of Health's commendable action. I am utterly opposed to the promotion of breastmilk substitutes and as the Bishop of Coventry, have for years campaigned to raise awareness of the harm this causes with my colleagues in the General Synod of the Church of England. Our focus has been on Nestle which I am sad to see, continues to undermine health. Their cunning halfway position is clearly in opposition to the Department of Health's stand. The two year ban must go ahead. All strength to you."

Notes for editors

1. The International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN) consists of over 200 groups in more than 100 countries. IBFAN groups work for the implementation of the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes and subsequent, relevant Resolutions and monitor company practices against these. Nestlé is found to be the worst of the companies and so the target of an international consumer boycott.
2. The campaign to defend the Philippines regulations was initiated by ARUGGAN, the Philippines member of IBFAN. The organisation has been conducting imaginative campaigns such as gathering over 1,000 women with decorated umbrellas in Manila (see www.babymilkaction.org for pictures).
3. Baby Milk Action is a not-for-profit organisation and the UK member of the International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN). It is funded by membership fees, merchandise sales and donations, along with grants from development organisations and charitable trusts.
4. For information on baby food marketing malpractice see the codewatch and boycott sections of www.babymilkaction.org
5. According to the World Health Organisation, 1.5 million infants die around the world every year because they are not breastfed. See the Your Questions Answered section of the site.
6. Endorsements for the petition of solidarity have been received from over 350 individuals and organisations from around the world including Australia, Brazil, Canada, France, Greece, Italy, Netherlands, New Zealand, Sweden, United States and United Kingdom
7. Organisations include: Baby Milk Action; IBFAN Europe (representing 58 groups in 35 countries, including Baby Milk Action); INFAC Canada; IBFAN Italy; The Italian Nestlé Boycott Network; NAFIA, the Nordic Work Group for International Breastfeeding Issues; National Childbirth Trust, UK; The Breastfeeding Network; Oxfam GB; Australian Lactation Consultants Association; Infant Feeding Association of New Zealand; Associazione Culturale Pediatri; Italy (Paediatric Cultural Association); Peoples Health Movement, USA; KASAPI HELLAS (Greek organisation of Filipino migrants); Sumisibol (US-Philippines teen cultural exchange organisation); Philippine Solidarity Group Netherlands; Universidade Federal de Ouro Preto (Federal University of Ouro Preto, Brazil); Movimento amigos do circuito das águas Mineiro (Movement of Friends of the Waters of Minas Gerais, Brazil); The University Of Sheffield Union Of Students; Churchties Vlaardingen-La Granja/Bacolod, Netherlands.