Year report 2006 - 2007

Solidarity with the Philippines

In August 2006 the Supreme Court in the Philippines initially rejected a plea by the pharmaceutical industry to put a restraining order on marketing regulations for baby foods introduced by the Department of Health. However, four days after President Arroyo received a warning letter from the President of the US Chamber of Commerce, Mike Donahue, of “the risk to the due process clause of the Constitution, insofar as the same is offensive to the due process clause of the United States, Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom have poured in in the wake of the “blackmail” of the Philippine Government by American businessmen over the country’s rules regulating the marketing of infant milk formula. “Do not let yourself be bullied by these outrageously inhuman beings – they are not supported by the citizens of their countries,” a mother from the Philippines wrote in an Internet-based ‘petition of solidarity’ started by the global advocacy group Baby Milk Action.”

Our campaign gained the support of Emma Thompson, Julie Walters and Zoe Wannamaker and helped break through a virtual reporting blackout, generating front-page headlines. The Daily Enquirer reported in November 2006: “Expressions of support from the United States, Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom have poured in in the wake of the “blackmail” of the Philippine Government by American businessmen over the country’s rules regulating the marketing of infant milk formula. “Do not let yourself be bullied by these outrageously inhuman beings – they are not supported by the citizens of their countries,” a mother from the Philippines wrote in an Internet-based ‘petition of solidarity’ started by the global advocacy group Baby Milk Action.”

Our Policy Director, Patti Rundall, appeared on TV and radio in the Philippines after accepting an invitation to visit the country from UNICEF. We promoted the film Formula for Disaster produced by UNICEF Philippines to show the reality of aggressive marketing. According to WHO, 16,000 infants die every year there due to inappropriate feeding. After the Regulations came into force, WHO thanked everyone who “remained faithful in their role to protect Philippine children’s health and welfare.”

This important victory in protecting infant health and mothers’ rights was achieved by national and international action. Our IBFAN partners in the Philippines mobilised 1,000 mothers for a photo-shoot in a park with slogan-painted umbrellas, mass breastfeeding events and a bare-breast protest outside the Supreme Court towards the end of the process.

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2006 BABY MILK ACTION

Raising Awareness

- Members and supporters were essential in raising awareness of the importance of protecting infant and young child health.
- One of our major campaigns during this period was in support of the Philippines as the industry challenged its formula marketing regulations. In November, we asked supporters to send messages of solidarity, which resulted in front-page media coverage in the Philippines. We promoted a film from UNICEF Philippines exposing the reality of company practices. As reported overhead, the campaign led to the Supreme Court eventually upholding the regulations.
- We coordinate the international boycott of Nestlé, the company responsible for more aggressive baby food promotion than any other. In July we coordinated the first International Nestlé-Free Week, marking the anniversary of the first boycott campaign, which led to the World Health Assembly bringing in marketing requirements. We were filmed by South Korean TV for its main morning news!
- Area contacts and staff held stalls and workshops at events in the UK including those organised by National Childbirth Trust (AGM and health professionals event), Association of Breastfeeding Mothers, Breastfeeding Network, Lactation Consultants of GB Baby Café, Baby Friendly Initiative, International Women’s Day, UNISON, national conference, Little Angels and Birthlight.
- We conducted the Nestlé Challenge the annual demonstration outside the Nestlé UK HQ in May, showing, with actual company materials, how mothers and health workers are targeted and the reality of preparing a feeding bottle in conditions of poverty.
- We attended the Labour Party Conference in September where Nestlé sponsored breaks, meetings, one on obesity and one on one on water.
- Our materials and information were cited in many reports, including a major investigation in May by The Guardian newspaper in Bangladesh, to mark the 30th Anniversary of the Boycott. This posed the question Is Nestlé Still Pushing Formula Milk in the Developing World (see front cover). It found the answer is yes, exposing Nestlé promoting Lactogen formula which health workers are asked to give to mothers. Nestlé attempted to justify the practice, though it is a clear violation of the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes.

BABY MILK ACTION

- A major focus throughout the year was the drafting of new Infant Formula and Follow-on Formula Regulations following the adoption of a revised European Union Directive in December 2006. Our work was carried out mainly through the Baby Feeding Law Group, (BFLG) a coalition of 23 health professional and key organisations and focused on persuading the Government to fulfil its promises (made in the Chooosing Health White paper) by implementing the Directive in the strongest possible way.
- We produced a 40-page report called Protecting breastfeeding - Protecting babies led onformula for the UK Government consultation on the Regulations in September on behalf of the BFLG.
- We continued to represent IBFAN at the European Commission’s Platform for Action on Diet, Physical Activity and Health, an initiative which aims to address the obesity epidemic. We have found that breastfeeding part is of the strategy. Following a Platform Plenary Meeting in July we entered into correspondence with Robert Medadin, the Director General of the EU Commission’s Health and Consumer Protection Directorate (DGSANCO). At issue is whether the EU Directive is a ‘total’ or ‘partial’ harmonisation measure and whether the advice given by Commission staff to Member States is appropriate. The EU Treaty states that ‘A high level of human health protection shall be ensured in the definition and implementation of all Community policies and activities’ but all too often the health purpose of the Directive is ignored. Baby Milk Action awaits the outcome of its complaint to the European Ombudsmann about maladministration by the Commission in its handling of the matter. We worked closely with MPs David Kennedy and Lynne Jones, Lord Avebury and MEPs Richard Howitt, Catherine Stihler and Glennis Kinnock and also met the Head of DG SANCO’s Legal Affairs Unit.

IBFAN

- We are the UK member of IBFAN (the International Baby Food Action Network) which consists of more than 200 groups in over 100 countries. Within IBFAN we have responsibility for our global campaigns and share responsibility for Code Advocacy in Europe.

Monitoring and Reporting

- We produce the Campaign for Ethical Marketing action sheets, exposing marketing malpractice around the world by all baby feeding companies and helping supporters write letters to company executives.
- We coordinate a UK monitoring project on behalf of the Baby Feeding Law Group and produced a briefing paper called ‘Hard Sell Formula in March. We reported various violations to Trading Standards officers and the Advertising Standards Authority. Following this action the FSA mounted a crackdown on illegal labels, but the new labels companies launched onto the market in April were also non-compliant.
- We conducted spot-monitoring of company telephone carelines in the UK in August and found that companies are failing to warn parents that powdered formula is not sterile or to give correct instructions on how to reduce the risks of contamination.
- We contributed information about UK baby food marketing to IBFAN’s global monitoring project, Breaking the Rules 2007 which was published in November 2007.

Code Advocacy

- We are the Secretariat of the UK Baby Feeding Law Group (BFLG) which includes the Royal Colleges of Midwives, Nursing and Paediatrics, and Community Practitioners’ Health Visitors’ Association and UNISON.
- We are on the Steering Group of the 38-member Breastfeeding Manifesto Coalition which has seven objectives, one of which is Code implementation and another the provision of independent information in schools.
- We coordinate the International Nestlé Boycott, launched by groups in 20 countries.
- We are also a member of NGO networks such as Sustain (The Children’s Food Bill), the UK Consortium on AIDS, the CASE Privatisation Group, CORE, the Trade Justice Movement and the UK Food Group.

Networking

- We produced two issues of the Update newsletter, briefing papers and the 2008 IBFAN breastfeeding calendar.
- In March we introduced a new range of t-shirts with images of a popular Brazilian fridge magnets.
- We launched a range of reusable shopping bags in July for International Nestlé-Free Week. Sales in our on-line Virtual Shop continue to grow.
- Page views on our website reached 100,000 in May, a new record.
- Our Campaign Coordinator, Mike Brady, continued his blog throughout the year and in April added a weekly podcast, particularly for those with reading difficulties. It can be found on our website and on iTunes.

Publishing and Marketing

- Why we do what we do: Gloria fed her son, Miguel, formula after having seen advertising suggesting it would make him more intelligent. When he became ill and malnourished she learned she had been misled and joined a protest at the Nestlé Supreme Court in the Philippines.

2007

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