

Message from the Chairperson NCPCR India

To

Fourth South Asia Breastfeeding Partners Forum, 12th December 2007

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the Fourth South Asia Breastfeeding Partners Forum being held here from today until the 12th of December. I regret I am unable to be with you, but as ombudsperson to the children of India, I have to take their concerns, including concerns related to breastfeeding, to the international 5-year review of world action to achieve the goals set for children's survival, development and protection in the 2002 'World fit for Children' being held in the United States on 11th and 12th. The Forum being held concurrently with the review will only serve to highlight the need for universalising optimal breastfeeding practices globally i.e. beginning breastfeeding within an hour, exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months and continue breastfeeding for 2 years or beyond along with adequate and appropriate complementary feeding.

Breastfeeding does not occur in a vacuum. It happens, or does not happen, in a world where women work, both in the house and outside, for long hours without rest, where they do not get enough to eat and are chronically malnourished, where they are victims of physical, mental and emotional violence, where they have little access to the health care system, and where they have even less space to voice their problems and concerns. All these affect women's ability to breastfeed successfully. Culture and traditions can aggravate the situation. At the same time, commercial interests damage their confidence in their ability to breastfeed, and thus a vicious cycle is established of not having enough milk, and thus to breastfeeding being replaced by other feeding practices.

The Millennium Development Goals seek to reduce deaths of under-5s by 2/3rd by 2015. The SAARC Development Goals seek to do this even faster. Much of these deaths occur during first year of life and are related to sub optimal infant feeding and because our South Asia Region has the highest number of infant deaths in the world, the region needs to scale up action on breastfeeding faster. But this cannot be done without if women are not supported to breastfeed optimally. The link between optimal breastfeeding and infant survival is well known. And, if women have to practice optimal breastfeeding, they need support from all stakeholders – the father, the family, the community and the State.

The theme for this Forum is: “Save babies: Support Women to Breastfeed”.

Over the next three days, the Forum will examine the challenges women face while breastfeeding, the kind of support that is needed, and hear how some organisations and governments of this region are meeting them. Together, we can create a new world for children and their mothers, a world where women can breastfeed successfully in an atmosphere of love, caring and sharing.

Deliberation at the 3 days Forum will lead to adopting a South Asia Declaration on '*Empowering women for optimal infant and young child feeding*'- we should all remain committed to the declaration for years to come. Evolving plans of regional and national action should be respected and followed up by each government and civil society partners, and International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN) in the movement to protect , promote and support breastfeeding in South Asia.

Shantha Sinha
Chairperson NCPCR