

## MEDIA RELEASE

### Call to action to stop the use of breastmilk substitutes in emergencies

**Jakarta March 21<sup>st</sup>, 2008:** The lives of babies and young children are being put at risk by the inappropriate use of breastmilk substitutes, particularly in emergency situations, says a coalition of more than 100 nutrition and emergency experts.

"The protection, promotion and support of infant and young children feeding in emergencies is inadequate. Inappropriate use of breastmilk substitutes in emergencies, often received as unsolicited donations, endangers the lives of infants and young children," says the coalition.

102 representatives from the UN, international NGOs, and Government from 16 countries gathered together in Bali 10<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> March at a meeting organized by the Emergency Nutrition Network. At the end of the 3 day meeting, a strongly worded statement was released with a call to action to prevent the continued use of breastmilk substitutes in emergencies and to improve the support of infant and young child feeding in emergencies in general.

"The issue of nutrition in emergencies, particularly for babies and young children, is of paramount importance ...and one that need serious attention," says Dr Gianfranco Rotigliano, UNICEF Representative to Indonesia. "We .....know that a decline in breastfeeding indicates an increase in the use of formula milk, which, even if used correctly, is inferior to breastmilk."

In emergency situations when clean water and opportunities to clean feeding bottles are often lacking, the risks associated with artificial feeding are particularly high. There is a common mis-conception that families in emergencies need infant formula and powdered milk. Authorities in emergencies often see unsolicited donations of such products flooding the affected area..

"Systems are urgently needed to prevent and control such donations in order to protect the lives of young children. And the public and the well intentioned donors need to be informed that such products are not needed or wanted during emergencies," says the coalition.

Presenters at the meeting emphasized the fact that improving infant and young child feeding during emergencies is one of the most effective ways of reducing death rates and preventing malnutrition.

In 2006 after the Yogyakarta earthquake, UNICEF, UNFPA, the local Department of Health, the University of Gadjah Mada and other partners conducted a survey. It began 21 days after the earthquake and found that some 70 per cent of households with children had received baby milk donations.

The survey revealed that infant formula donations had contributed to a two-fold increase in formula consumption among children under-two and, consequently, a six-fold increase in rates of diarrhoea among these children. Diarrhoea is the second biggest killer of children in developing countries after acute respiratory tract infections.

This was one of the first surveys to document the extent and scale of infant formula donations and its impact on feeding practices and illness rates.

"We know through decades of medical research that breastfeeding children up to the age of two years, or even longer, gives them the optimum opportunity for growth, development and good health. In the first six months of life, it is the only food and drink a baby needs," says Dr .Rotigliano.

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