

## World Breastfeeding Week 2007

Message by UNICEF Iran's Goodwill Ambassador, Ms. Mahtab Keramati

Exclusive breastfeeding within the first hour of birth, and up to six months after birth, is one of the most powerful tools to combat infant mortality and improve the health of children and their mothers.

Celebrating World Breastfeeding Week should mean more than a mere ceremony. It is estimated that almost one-fifth of all child deaths could be prevented if mothers breastfed their babies within the first hour, saving over two million children per year worldwide.

In a developing country, a child who is breastfed is almost three times more likely to survive infancy than a child who is not breastfed. In Iran, however, statistics show that half of all babies are weaned of exclusive breastfeeding before the age of four months.

Breast milk contains hundreds of health-enhancing antibodies and enzymes that stimulate the immune system and improve children's response to vaccinations. It also helps to prevent diarrhoea, pneumonia, and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).

In addition to the short-term benefits to a child's and mother's health, evidence indicates the role of breastfeeding in preventing chronic disease in adulthood, such as overweight/obesity and type-2 diabetes.

Breastfeeding and good nutrition for children are critical for achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals, particularly those goals that relate to child survival, such as reducing the rate of under-five child mortality by two-thirds by 2015, and to eradicating extreme poverty and hunger.

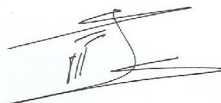
In many countries in the world, the combination of weak public health systems, marketing of milk formula and poor enforcement of marketing regulations have contributed to the decline of breastfeeding. I believe health workers should be equipped with the skills and knowledge to assist new mothers in how to breastfeed.

In addition to the public health benefits of breastfeeding, the economic savings for both families and health systems are potentially enormous. Many families are increasingly spending a large part of their income on infant formula, thinking by mistake that it is a way to improve their child's intelligence and chances for a better life.

UNICEF's Goal is the empowerment of all women to breastfeed their children exclusively for six months and to continue breastfeeding, with complementary food, well into the second year and beyond.

Let us all contribute to the realization of this goal – the final result of a decrease in the number of infant deaths and an improved health of babies, children and mothers is surely worth our effort!

Mahtab Keramati



UNICEF Iran's  
Goodwill Ambassador