

United Arab Emirates – Statement by GIFA 19 March 2009, Universal Periodic Review

Chairman, Distinguished Members of the Human Rights Council, Honourable Delegates,

I am speaking today on behalf of the Geneva Infant Feeding Association which hosts the International Baby Food Action Network and the Regional Coordinating Office of IBFAN Arab World in Geneva. Our work focuses on protecting, promoting and supporting breastfeeding in particular by monitoring the WHO/UNICEF *International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes* at national level.

In the UAE we have developed professional links within the health department of the State, and are impressed by the open attitude of a number of officials seeking advice and examples of best practices that they would readily reproduce.

For example, the UAE has a **national policy on infant and young child feeding** that follows some WHO recommendations. However, the UAE has not yet adopted a **national law on the marketing of breast milk substitutes** though a draft has been in the hands of the Department of legal affairs of the Ministry of Health for more than one year – and it seems to be at a standstill. Adopting and implementing immediately a strong national law based on the International Code is all the more necessary that the UAE represents a particularly lucrative market for the booming baby food industry in the region.

Concerning **maternity protection at work**, we acknowledge some very recent improvements to legislation. However, paid leave in the UAE is very short at only 8 weeks. It is urgent to strengthen the maternity protection law by extending paid leave, but also by ensuring that the right of foreign workers to the same length of leave as nationals is implemented. We also suggest harmonizing legislation throughout the UAE.

As for the **Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI)**, we would recommend that ALL maternity hospitals, public and private, be certified baby friendly as a condition for being allowed to open and to function.

Lastly we would like to underline that the UAE has been due to report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child since 2004 and that it has not yet ratified the Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights.

The examples we state focus only on a few mother's and child's rights. We would hope that a country such as the UAE that profits from considerable wealth, technical expertise, as well as openness to new projects will accept to be guided by universally accepted public interest recommendations that it has itself endorsed.

Thank you.