



# Women's Right To Work

## Women's Right To Motherhood

As part of motherhood every woman has right to breastfeed her infant to safeguard the health of her infant and herself.

### How can breastfeeding be a human right?

- All human beings have human rights.
- Woman and children have rights equal to everyone else.
- Women and children are *subjects of human rights – not objects of charity*.
- Breastfeeding is part of fundamental human rights: the right to food and to health.
- Breastmilk is the best food for newborns and infants, barring exceptional circumstances. It provides a nutritionally balanced food for children to ensure their survival, growth and development.
- The act of breastfeeding is an essential component of good child care, contributing to healthy growth and psychosocial development.
- Breastfeeding contributes to every woman's right to health by reducing the risk of certain illness.

### Who has the right?

- Every woman has the right to breastfeed her child.
- Almost all governments have legally obliged themselves to fulfill the rights contained in international agreements such as the
  - Convention of the Rights of the child,
  - Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and
  - Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Many rights linked to the right to breastfeed can be found in these agreements:

- The Convention of the Rights of the Child provides
  - That it is the right of children to enjoy the highest attainable standard of health
  - That governments shall ensure provision of nutritious food, and
  - That parents and children have information about nutrition and the advantages of breastfeeding.
- The Covenant on Economic and Social Rights guarantees the right to food and to health.
- The Convention against Discrimination of Women says that women shall have appropriate services in connection with pregnancy and lactation (breastfeeding).

### Why is it important to stress that breastfeeding is a right?

Breastfeeding is a right for every mother, and it is essential to fulfill every child's right to *adequate food and the highest attainable standard of health*. Breastfeeding as a human right implies that:

- Children must have access to adequate food and nutrition to ensure healthy development from birth. This comes from breastfeeding exclusively in the first six months and together with complementary foods for two years and beyond.
- Governments have the duty to ensure that there are no obstacles for women who choose to breastfeed.
- Women cannot be discriminated against because they are breastfeeding.
- Women can demand adequate information and support to be able to breastfeed.
- Women can demand not to be exposed to undue pressure from breastmilk substitute producers through advertising or any other form of promotion.

Does breastfeeding benefit only infants?

*No? Mothers and their infants benefit from breastfeeding.*

### **Benefits to the Mother**

Breastfeeding has many benefits for the mother, which includes the following:

- ☒ It has a protective effect against breast and ovarian cancers.
- ☒ It reduces postpartum bleeding.
- ☒ It promotes early uterine involution.
- ☒ Obesity is less common among breastfeeding mothers as it helps the mother regain her normal figure.
- ☒ Exclusive Breastfeeding has a contraceptive effect in the first 4 to 6 months postpartum (if her period has not returned and the gap between any two breastfeeds is not more than 4 hours/day and 6 hours/night).
- ☒ Mothers who exclusively breastfed their babies are better adjusted with their babies as far as rearing and behavioral adjustment is concerned.

### **Benefits to the baby**

- ☒ It reduces the frequency of infections of the middle ear (otitis media)
- ☒ It reduces the risk of attacks of asthma and allergies
- ☒ It reduces the incidences of dental caries and crooked teeth
- ☒ It increases the I.Q.
- ☒ It gives better vision.
- ☒ Develop better mathematical abilities.
- ☒ It reduces the chances of developing hypertension, diabetes mellitus, coronary heart diseases, appendicitis, liver diseases & even cancer in later life.

### **As breastfeeding is a private matter, is there a role for the government to play?**

*Yes? While the decision to breastfeed or not lies with each mother; there are a number of things that governments should do to protect, promote and support the right to breastfeeding:*

*The government should:*

- Recognise in law that women and children have rights to food and health.
- Provide for adequate maternity leave (at least 4, but preferably 6 months) after giving birth to facilitate exclusive breastfeeding.
- Provide for flexible work hours (by law) for mothers returning to work, including breastfeeding breaks.
- Protect a woman's right to breastfeed in public places.
- Train health workers, including doctors, midwives and nurses in the protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding.
- Provide information on the advantages of breastfeeding, particularly to pregnant women to *enable each one to make informed decisions*.
- Prevent any form of promotion of breastmilk substitutes, bottles or teats to the public, but especially to women prior to or just after birth.
- Call on employers to provide facilities to enable working mothers to continue to breastfeed or express and store milk.
- Support better provisions in the ILO Convention No. 103 on Maternity Protection, currently being revised (June 1999-June 2000)