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Children Speak

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A Newsletter of the Organization for the Protection of Children's Rights

Message from the President

Poverty and violence, both physical and psychological, affect hundreds of millions of children and families worldwide. In line with our determination to bring concrete solutions to the topical problems currently faced by children and their families, the **O.P.C.R.** has already held five International Conferences on the Child – with the two last ones having for theme Violence (1999) and Poverty (2002) respectively. Proceedings and declarations from these two conferences, which have produced real collective benefits and generated support and momentum for children's rights internationally, can be downloaded from our website at www.opcr.org.



Riccardo Di Done

Poverty and violence are crucial issues for children in our modern industrialized world. The human, economic, social and health costs of not addressing these issues are already enormous and pose a serious threat to our future as a society.

It is in this context that the Organization for the Protection of Children's Rights (O.P.C.R.) will hold an international Summit on Children, Poverty and Violence on October 22 and 23, 2004 in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. Its main objectives are to establish a creative dialogue and form a global partnership between professionals and leading thinkers from academia, NGOs, civil society organizations and voluntary bodies for effective implementation and compliance of international treaties on children; to stimulate the formation of innovative multidisciplinary solutions to topical problems faced by children; and to establish a sustainable child-rights based action plan that includes effective mechanisms for implementation and monitoring over a five-year period.

35 recognized specialists and interdisciplinary thinkers from all five continents will be invited to focus on five themes – Violence, Education, Health, Legal and social protection, Food and nutrition – in a concerted effort to improved knowledge and promote the use of programmes, policies and practices that have proven effective in reducing poverty and violence against children.

People who would like to take part in the Summit or have more information should contact Mr. Pascal Fischer by phone at (514) 593-4303 or by email at pfischer@osde.ca. Together, we can and will make a difference!

FOR THE LOVE OF OUR CHILDREN!



Busting Baby Food Ads

By Roshni Udyavar

The recent announcement by the Government of India to ban baby food ads in any form of mass media starting on January 1, 2004 is hailed as a progressive move, considering the handful of countries like Sweden that have adopted such measures. The ban brought about by an amendment to the Infant Milk Substitutes Act, 1992, could set a worldwide precedent or at least a model for developing countries. The campaign for this ban began more than thirty years ago when the Indian Academy of Pediatrics (IAP), Federation of Gynecologists and Obstetrics Society of India (FOGSI) and India Medical Association (IMA) together decided to boycott baby food companies.

The Amendment proclaims to punish even health care workers, pharmacies and drugstores promoting or displaying baby food ads. Although critics have expressed concern for mothers who are unable to breastfeed due to medical problems or those who would like to supplement with formula foods, it must be recognized that the ban only prohibits companies from advertising their products and does not restrict their production and sale.

Recently, the international environmental organization Greenpeace reported that the United States' leading baby-food maker is selling products containing genetically altered ingredients. Gerber Mixed Cereal for Baby, a dry three-grain cereal mix for infants, tested positive for DNA from transgenic insect-resistant "Bt Corn" and herbicide tolerant "Roundup Ready" soybeans, stated a Greenpeace press release early last month. The altered corn found in the Gerber cereal includes genes that produce a bacterial toxin, *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt). When genetically altered Bt plants grow, they produce the toxin, which is an insecticide farmers use to ward off



“Unlabeled genetically altered products leave parents little choice but to have their children used as guinea pigs in this corporate experiment with our food,” said Greenpeace Genetic Engineering Specialist Charles Margulis. In the U.S., the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) does not require any pre-market safety testing of GE foods. Instead, the agency relies on biotech companies to undertake studies voluntarily, but no long-term studies have established the safety of dozens of GE foods currently on the market.

On the other hand, the British Medical Association, a consortium of 115,000 doctors, has gone one step further. Last month, it called for a moratorium on the introduction of GE crops into the environment and food chain. The report suggests that precautionary action should be taken “for the foreseeable future...until the health and environmental impact of genetically modified organisms are fully assessed....”

Genetically Engineered ingredients, however, are only a recent addition. Most baby foods contain chemical additives, preservatives, emulsifiers and stabilizers such as sugars, starch, salt and Carrageenan. Most of these lack vitamins and minerals essential to health. Worse, they displace foods that do have vitamin

food has the effect of establishing a liking for sweet “empty calorie” food, while it is more than well established that intake of salt in early infancy leads to high blood pressure in later life. Cow’s milk, the basis for most baby food, is known to contain nearly 3 times as much salt as breast milk. Reconstructed dried milk may contain even more. Starch, another common ingredient found in baby foods is introduced to prevent development of a watery and unappealing look, but babies fed on starch are nutritionally handicapped, especially due to the lack of protein essential for physical and mental growth. Sodium nitrate, used as a preservative, is potentially poisonous. A safe nitrate level in drinking water is 45 parts per million. However, what is safe in general may not be safe for infants who are easily susceptible to mildly poisonous substances.

The Brits have, in fact, taken a serious view of the various junk foods being targeted on their children by the electronic media. In November of this year, labor MP Debra Shipley supported by 100 MPs and 89 organizations including the National Heart Foundation, the National Union of Teachers, the Women’s Institute, the British Heart Foundation and the National Obesity Federation, brought in a

Private member's bill aimed at banning ads during preschool children's TV for foods with high fat, sugar or salt content. She stated that a child is likely to see between 6 and 11 advertisements every hour on children's TV for food high in sugar, salt and fat. For instance, 89% of breakfast cereals advertised during children's TV were high in sugar.

In 1981, concerns over "Bottle Baby Disease" (a water-borne disease originating from unsafe water mixed with powdered baby food), now common in most parts of the third world, led to the drawing up of the WHO/UNICEF International code of marketing of Breast Milk Substitutes. At the World Health Assembly in the same year, 118 countries voted for this to become the new voluntary code of practice adopted as a minimum requirement for all countries. After a long boycott campaign, Nestle and other companies eventually agreed to abide by the Code, and the boycott was called off in 1984. However reports have continued to come in from around the world that baby milk companies are still violating the Code, and Nestle in particular has become the focus of criticism being by far the largest supplier of baby milk to Third World countries. The boycott campaign was re-launched in 1988, and is now

Nestle holding about 50% of the world's breast milk substitute market and the largest supplier of baby milk to Third World countries has consistently breached the 1981 WHO Code, marketing its products by giving away free samples of baby milk to hospitals, or misinforming mothers and health workers in promotional literature.

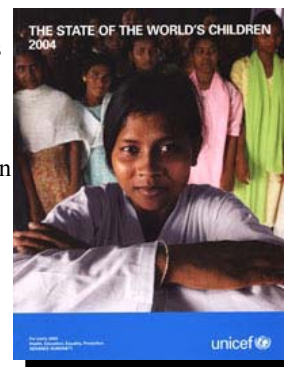
active in over 80 countries.

Says Raj K. Anand, Pediatrician, crusader against baby food in Mumbai, India, "Besides being healthy for the child, breast-feeding in no way adversely affects the mother. It prevents ovarian and breast cancers, contracts the enlarged uterus and helps in recovering the mother's figure post-pregnancy". Human breast milk is superior to modified cow's milk formulas, is absorbed easily by the infant and provides vitamins, minerals, protein and anti-infectious factors. Human breast milk contains antibodies that protect the infants' gastrointestinal tract. The early milk, or colostrum, is rich in essential amino acids, the protein building blocks essential for growth; it also contains the proteins that convey immunity to some infections from mother to young. Besides, breast-feeding is part of building up the mother-child relationship.

For many years now, the media has been criticized for its unethical support to mercenary corporations, using, as quoted in Adbusters, "psychological tricks to sell junk food to kids, using sex to sell beer, hype to sell cars or lies to sell war." It is time for media networks everywhere to review their advertising policies and voluntarily dissuade corporations that promote unsustainable practices. □

State of the World's Children Report 2004 launched

The State of the World's Children 2004, officially launched by the UNICEF Executive Director, Carol Bellamy on 11 December 2003 at the World Summit on Information Society in Geneva, emphasizes the important role that girls' education plays in advancing human development. It highlights strategies, programmes and initiatives in place in countries all around the world aimed at promoting girls' education and improving the lives of all children.



Pages: 156

List Price: \$12.95

UNICEF noted that illiteracy rates are still far higher among women than men, and at least 9 million more girls than boys are left out of school every year. "Educating girls on an equal basis with boys, addressing the needs of all, is not an optional investment," Bellamy said. "None of the world's wealthier countries developed without making a significant investment in education. That's a lesson we need to keep in mind if we're serious about really doing things differently in this world. This is a test for us. Whether we pass or fail will have major and lasting consequences." □

(UNICEF)

Soft Drinks Contribute to Children's Overweight

In a recent study of children aged 6 to 13, Cornell University researchers found that when the kids drank more than 12 ounces of soft drinks per day, those drinks typically took the place of milk in their diets. So the sodadrinkers took in less protein, vitamin A, calcium and other minerals daily. At the same time, they consumed more calories overall and gained weight as a result.

In the study, "excessive" meant drinking more than 12 ounces a day, or the size of a typical can of soda. But many soft drinks come in 16 or 20 ounce containers, so it's easier than you might expect for a child to hit the definition of excessive.

Sweet, high-caloried soft drinks are a problem for young and old alike. Choosing water instead of soda just once a day will cut 200 calories. Nutritionist Molly Gee of the Baylor College of Medicine advises: "Just have a glass with every meal, before and after a workout and never pass a water fountain without taking a sip." □

(Adapted from Child Health Alert)

The United Nations Literacy Decade, 2003 - 2012

The United Nations Literacy Decade (2003-2012) aims to extend the use of literacy to those who do not currently have access to it. Over 861 million adults are in that position, two thirds of which are women, thus adding to the deprivation and subordination they are already subject, and over 113 million children are not in school and therefore not gaining access to literacy either. The Decade will focus on the needs of different groups of people with the goal that people everywhere should be able to use literacy to communicate

within their own community, in the wider society and beyond. Literacy efforts have so far failed to reach the poorest and most marginalised groups of people – the Decade will particularly address such populations, under the banner of Literacy for all: voice for all, learning for all.

The outcome of the Decade will be locally sustainable literate environments. These environments will give people opportunities to express their ideas and views, engage in effective learning, participate in the written communication which characterizes democratic societies, and exchange knowledge with others. This will include, increasingly the use of electronic media and

AP



exchange in a globalising world.

The International Plan of Action for the Literacy Decade proposes Policy change, flexible programmes, capacity-building, research, community participation and monitoring and evaluation. A key feature of the Decade will be the prominent role learners will take in the design of literacy strategies for their own situations. Community-based organisations, NGOs and civil society will provide channels for collective action. Governments will have the responsibility to work closely with

OBSERVANCES & CONFERENCES

information technologies, both as a means of self-expression and for accessing and assessing the vast stores of knowledge available today.

The Literacy Decade is an initiative of the United Nations General Assembly, adopted unanimously in a resolution of December 2001. Thus it expresses strongly the collective will of the international community, both those who face a big literacy challenge and those who may be in a position to give assistance in meeting it. The nations of the world recognise that the promotion of literacy is in the interest of all, as part of efforts towards peace, respect and

them, negotiating resource provision: training input, financial support, institutional recognition and validation. At the international level, the UN General Assembly asked UNESCO to take on the coordinating role, bringing partners together for joint action and policy debate.

The Literacy Decade is also part of broader international work in education and development. The Education for All (EFA) goal of increasing literacy rates by 50% by 2015 provides the overall target for the Decade, and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) set the Decade in the context of poverty reduction. Literacy promotion is at the heart of both EFA and MDG goals.

(UNESCO)

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