



DECLARATION IN CELEBRATION OF WORLD BREASTFEEDING WEEK

BREASTFEEDING SUPPORT: CLOSE TO MOTHERS

August 1-7, 2013

As Director of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), I take great pride in joining with PAHO's sister UN Agencies, the World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA), the International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN) and the countries of the Americas in celebrating World Breastfeeding Week, 1-7 August 2013. This year's theme, "Breastfeeding Support: Close to Mothers," focuses on the support needed to enable mothers to optimally breastfeed their babies. It is my hope that every Member State in our region will hold an event or multiple events to celebrate breastfeeding and to highlight its many short- and long-term benefits for both mothers and babies. These celebrations also provide an opportunity to take stock of national trends in breastfeeding and opportunities for their improvement.

Although breastfeeding has been increasing in many countries of the Americas, much remains to be done to optimize breastfeeding practices. In most countries of the region, fewer than half of babies begin breastfeeding within the first hour of life, as recommended by PAHO/WHO. Exclusive breastfeeding (giving only breast milk, as recommended) for the first six months is also low, ranging from 8% to 68% of babies in different countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. Although breastfeeding should last for two years or more, the average for the region is only a bit more than 13 months and in different countries ranges from 7 to 18 months. Supporting mothers during pregnancy and the crucial days after delivery with counseling—in peer-support groups or by health professionals—can improve these breastfeeding practices.

To highlight this year's World Breastfeeding Week, PAHO has developed a policy brief summarizing how mothers can be better supported to achieve their breastfeeding goals. PAHO has also created a poster entitled "Breastfeeding Support: Close to Mothers." These materials are available online in English, French, Portuguese and Spanish at www.paho.org/childfeeding.

Please join me in calling for a commitment from all sectors of society to redouble our efforts to support breastfeeding mothers, so that all mothers and babies can enjoy the many benefits of breastfeeding.

Dr. Carissa F. Etienne
Director