



## **Written statement from IBFAN to INB9 on the revised draft of the negotiating text of the WHO Pandemic Agreement (document [A/INB/9/3](#))**

21<sup>st</sup> March 2024

IBFAN welcomes the opportunity to address this session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Body (INB) and fully appreciate the difficulty of the task ahead.

Along with the call from many public health NGOs, for the right to health to be reinstated, IBFAN's focus is on the protection of spaces where infants and young children are born and fed to ensure that they are as supportive and as free as possible from undue commercial influence.

IBFAN watched the chaos that ensued in relation to infant and young child feeding during the COVID 19 pandemic, where widespread fear of viral transmission was exploited and fuelled by an increase in the predatory marketing of the baby feeding industry. Marketing implied – with no sound evidence – that untested ingredients would build immunity and companies brazenly offered their services as partners in providing feeding 'information' for parents. All in direct conflict with WHO and national health guidance.

The disinformation they spread – much of it digitally - eclipsed the regularly updated and evidence-based advice produced by WHO and UNICEF who highlighted the life-saving importance of breastfeeding in helping destroy harmful pathogens and building resistance to so many threats.

During Covid the widespread routine separation of mothers and babies led to a fall of 40-50% in breastfeeding rates in some hospitals.

It is no wonder that IBFAN watches out for terminology relating to 'public private partnerships'. We know how easily 'roles' get confused, how the shared decision-making (inherent in partnerships) can confuse and compromise the freedom to act in the public interest.

We strongly urge that the text of this important agreement avoids such terminology and strengthens its transparency and Conflict of Interest safeguards to ensure that policy setting and implementation is protected at all levels from commercial influence, so that mothers can take decisions on infant feeding free of commercial predatory marketing influences