

PRESS RELEASE

“Promotion of baby formula threatens progress on child nutrition and child mortality in Cambodia” say civil society and UN agencies

- *Government legislation not being followed by companies marketing baby formula.*
- *Up to 40% of Cambodian children remain undernourished.*

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia, 7 May 2014 - Civil society and UN agencies in Cambodia today issued a joint statement to make parents aware that breast milk substitutes, like baby formula, is not the best option for their children’s health and calling for improved commercial adherence to Sub-Decree 133 regulating the promotion of breast milk substitutes.

UNICEF, the World Health Organization, World Vision International in Cambodia, Helen Keller International Cambodia and Save the Children in Cambodia are expressing concern that breast milk substitute companies are ignoring the good legislation established by the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) designed to protect the health and nutrition of newborns and children. Sub-decree 133 was issued in 2005 to ensure that companies do not use misleading or inaccurate marketing or labels that can confuse parents and caregivers.

According to civil society actors in Cambodia, improved exclusive breastfeeding in Cambodia has led to falling child mortality rates. However up to 40 per cent of Cambodian children remain undernourished and misleading marketing and use of breast milk substitutes, including baby formula, may prevent and limit further progress.

“The healthiest choice for your newborn is to exclusively breastfeed them for the first 6 months of their life, and then gradually introduce other nutritious food while continuing to breastfeed until age 2 or beyond,” said Rana Flowers, Representative of UNICEF, one of the signatories to the joint statement.

“There are a staggering 113 different breast milk substitutes available on the market in Phnom Penh alone, and so far we have not found any that adhere entirely to the government’s good legislation,” said Mr Hou Kroeun, Program Manager at Helen Keller International Cambodia. *“This is a real challenge for mothers, fathers and caregivers who are trying to make positive choices for their newborns, but are confused by misleading messages and promises made by baby feeding companies. A quick visit to any supermarket in Phnom Penh shows just how prevalent the issue is,”* said Hou Kroeun.

The first 1000 days of a child’s life (from pregnancy until age 2) is a critical window in a child’s health. Poor nutrition during this period can have long term and irreversible effects on children, impacting both their physical and mental development and growth.

On the eve of the 67th World Health Assembly between 19 and 24 May, 2014, where infant and young child feeding will be in the spotlight, the joint statement is calling on the Royal Government of Cambodia to take steps to improve commercial adherence to Sub-Decree 133.

For interviews, questions, or for a copy of the Joint Statement, please contact:

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About UNICEF

UNICEF promotes the rights and wellbeing of every child, in everything we do. Together with our partners, we work in 190 countries and territories to translate that commitment into practical action, focusing special effort on reaching the most vulnerable and excluded children, to the benefit of all children, everywhere. For more information about UNICEF and its work in Cambodia visit: www.unicef.org.kh

About World Vision International in Cambodia

World Vision is a Christian relief, development and advocacy organization dedicated to working with children, families and communities to overcome poverty and injustice across 98 countries around the globe. In Cambodia, we partner with children and youth, their families and communities, across all faiths, religions, gender, ethnicities and political associations, to improve the wellbeing of children. For more information about World Vision and its work in Cambodia visit: www.wvi.org/cambodia

About Save the Children in Cambodia

Save the Children is the world's leading independent organisation for children. We work in 120 countries. We aim to inspire breakthroughs in the way the world treats children, and to achieve immediate and lasting change in their lives through empowering children and parents and strengthening systems and mechanisms in order to monitor and implement the UNCRC, provide access of relevant and quality education for all children, support children's health and nutrition, prevent and protect children from exploitation and abuse and provide care and support to children. In times of acute crisis, we mobilize rapid assistance to help children recover from the effects of war, conflict and natural disasters. For more information visit <http://cambodia.savethechildren.net>

About WHO

The mandate of the World Health Organization is the attainment by all peoples of the highest possible level of health. The WHO's maternal and child health programmes in collaboration with ministries of health in member states include key interventions to improve maternal, newborn and child health. For more information about WHO's work in the Western Pacific Region visit: www.wpro.who.int

About Helen Keller International

Founded in 1915 by Helen Keller and George Kessler, the mission of Helen Keller International (HKI) is to save the sight and lives of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged. HKI combats the causes and consequences of blindness and malnutrition by establishing programs based on evidence and research in vision, health and nutrition. Headquartered in New York City, HKI's programs prevent blindness and reduce malnutrition in 22 countries in Africa and Asia, as well as in the United States. Visit our website: www.hki.org