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Response to Consultation Document on Proposed Regulatory Framework on Nutrition and Health Claims on Infant Formula, Follow-up Formula and Prepackaged Foods for Infants and Young Children under the Age of 36 Months in Hong Kong

**submitted to
Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene
The Legislative Council**

The Against Child Abuse has been established for 34 years. We are committed to protecting children and eliminating all forms of child abuse.

We welcome the Government's proposal to protect the health of infants and young children and to establish a regulatory framework on nutrition and health claims for foods for children under the age of 36 months.

The first 36 months is the most vital developmental period for children. Optimal nutrition and good feeding practices promote bonding and appropriate social behavior. Breastfeeding provides ideal food for the healthy growth and development of infants and has a unique biological and emotional influence on the health of both infant and mother. Many longitudinal studies show that the longer breastfeeding period, the better the bonding, the stronger the sense of security and the potential for child abuse is reduced.¹ The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child Article 24 states that every child should have the right "to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health." Infants should be exclusively breastfed for the first 6 months of life to achieve optimal growth, development and health. WHO's core indicators for early feeding are: 1) early initiation of breastfeeding; 2) exclusive breastfeeding under 6 months; 3) continue breastfeeding for 1 year; and 4) introduce solid, semi-solid or soft foods at 2-3 years old.²

¹ Strathearn L, Mamun AA, Najman JM, O'Callaghan MJ, "Does Breastfeeding Protect Against Substantiated Child Abuse and Neglect? A 15-year cohort study." *Journal of Pediatrics*, 2009 Feb; 123(2): 483-493.

² Protecting, promoting and supporting breast-feeding: the special role of maternity services. A joint WHO/UNICEF statement. Geneva, World Health Organization, 1989.

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“Parents and children, are informed, have access to education and are supported in the use of basic knowledge of child health and nutrition” (UNCRC Art. 24). Parents should be given accurate and appropriate information to ensure children are provided with balanced and healthy foods.

Regarding the five principles proposed, we have the following views:

Principle 1: We Agree that nutrition claims (content and comparative) should be prohibited in infant formula except for certain conditions, e.g. lactose free.

Principle 2: We Agree that reduction disease risk claims should be prohibited in formula products and IYC foods.

Principle 3: We Disagree with permitting nutrition claims (content and comparative) and nutrient function claims in IYC foods. We should encourage infants to transit to a regular diet by 2-3 years old. Nutrient information should be provided instead of permitting nutrient claims.

Principle 4: We Agree that nutrients or constituents permitted to be the subject of claims should be of high importance for the health of infants and young children. The government should tighten the control over these claims such as using exaggerated wordings and representations.

Principle 5: We Agree that nutrition and health claims should meet specific content conditions and health claims should be scientifically substantiated and have undergone credible evaluation process. A scientific committee or a mechanism should be set up to produce a list of approved “claims”, evaluate “claims” that are permitted and address complaints.

We fully **agree to develop a Nutrition and Feeding Policy** for Hong Kong children as the nutritional situation of our children and good feeding practices will lead to good health in adulthood.

The grace period should be short as any delay in the introduction of the regulatory mechanism will have a life-long impact on infants and young children.

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While supporting the legislation on the Nutritional Claims, we also suggest that the Hong Kong Code of Marketing and Quality of Formula Milk and Related Products, and Food Products for Infants and Young Children be implemented as soon as possible.

Dr Jessica Ho
Director
Against Child Abuse

6 February 2015