



COLUMBAN MISSION CENTRE



Uniting Church in Australia
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA

Media Release

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From: Kim Cain, Media Liaison – 0419 373 123

Immoral formula:

Multinational baby food companies oppose ethical marketing of infant formula

A coalition of Australian church, medical specialist and breastfeeding organisations today urged three of the world's top baby food companies to stop supporting legal action that would prevent ethical marketing guidelines for infant formula in the Philippines.

The Australian Breastfeeding Association, the Uniting Church in Australia, the Australian Lactation Consultants Association and the Columban Mission said today that large multinational baby food companies, Wyeth, Abbott, and Mead Johnson, are putting thousands of babies lives at risk by opposing new guidelines to protect mothers and babies from unethical marketing of infant formula.

All three companies are part of the Pharmaceutical and Healthcare Association of the Philippines (PHAP) that has taken the Philippine Government to the Supreme Court in order to block the introduction of infant formula marketing regulations based on World Health Organisation (WHO) standards.

All three US-based companies sell their products in Australia.

"In our view these companies are willing to put the pursuit of their profits before the lives and health of babies in the Philippines", said Dr Mark Zirnsak, social justice spokesperson for the Uniting Church in Victoria and Tasmania.

"We call on all of these companies to withdraw support for the court case and demand that the Pharmaceutical and Healthcare Association of the Philippines withdraw from the case", said Barb Glare, spokesperson for the Australian Breastfeeding Association.

"In their marketing material, formula companies constantly reinforce the value of breastfeeding to the health of the infant and young child. Now we ask them to show this by not contesting the introduction of the new rules and regulations in relation to the "Milk Code" in the Philippines", said Gwen Moody, President, Australian Lactation Consultants Association.

The new regulations on the marketing of infant formula and baby food have the support of the WHO, UNICEF, and the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food.

The WHO in the Philippines estimates that 16,000 babies die every year because they are not adequately breastfed, with the marketing activities of companies like Wyeth, Abbott, and Mead Johnson contribute to this extreme level of infant mortality. Bottle-fed babies and those fed foods other than breast milk make up 90% of those that die under the age of six months.

Wyeth gives out 'gifts' to health workers in the Philippines. Further, according to Alex Padilla, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Health in the Philippines, "new mothers have often been given infant formula by doctors and midwives in the hospitals, on commission from the milk formula companies."



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“In our view the gifts are thinly veiled inducements handed out in the hope of increasing product sales with a disregard for the health of babies”, said Dr Mark Zirnsak of the Uniting Church.

“I call on my fellow Australians to put pressure on Wyeth, Abbott, and Mead Johnson to see the court case in the Philippines dropped. This could include avoiding the purchase of products sold by these companies, where possible, until they stop their evil plans”, said Fr Brian Gore, Regional Director of Columban Mission in the Philippines who was imprisoned under the Marcos regime.

An international campaign is under way against the companies pursuing the court case which has the support of a range of NGOs, such as the International Baby Food Action Network, and Baby Milk Action and actor, Emma Thompson.

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