

**A Letter from Anthony Lake, Executive Director of UNICEF
on the Occasion of World Breastfeeding Week 2013**

All children deserve a healthy start in life, and there is no better way to provide that than through breastfeeding.

From August 1-7, we celebrate World Breastfeeding Week — an opportunity to highlight the critical role breastfeeding plays in a child's growth, development and survival.

Science has repeatedly demonstrated the great advantages of breastfeeding, which not only provides nutrients critical to a child's health in the earliest days, but also prevents infectious diseases and reduces the risk of long-term chronic conditions, such as obesity. Studies also show that breastfeeding promotes cognitive development, thus helping children learn and earn more as adults, spurring economic activity and long-term growth while reducing poverty and inequities.

Recognizing these benefits, more governments are putting breastfeeding at the centre of their childhood nutrition programmes, and the number of countries with increasing breastfeeding rates continues to grow.

But too many infants around the world are still not receiving these benefits. The World Health Assembly has set an ambitious target to increase the exclusive breastfeeding rate to at least 50 per cent by 2025. Education and counselling on breastfeeding practices hold great potential to help us reach this target.

Political will and community involvement are also essential. A recent UNICEF review of six countries showed that the right mix of supportive government policies, comprehensive childhood feeding programmes, trained healthcare workers and community outreach significantly increased breastfeeding rates, especially among those with the lowest access to health care and education, and those living in the poorest and most remote communities.

With our partners in government and communities, UNICEF is strengthening and expanding programmes that support breastfeeding, and intensifying our advocacy efforts to shine a light on the importance of infant and young child feeding to young minds and bodies, and to society as a whole.

Together we can support mothers everywhere as they, in turn, give their children the greatest gift of all: a healthy start in life.



Anthony Lake,
Executive Director, UNICEF