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CELEBRATING THE INNOCENTI DECLARATION ON THE PROTECTION, PROMOTION AND SUPPORT OF BREASTFEEDING 1990–2005, *Florence, 21-22 November 2005*

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15 Years After Innocenti Declaration, Breastfeeding Saving Six Million Lives Annually

GENEVA/FLORENCE, 22 November 2005 – Six million lives a year are being saved by exclusive breastfeeding, and global breastfeeding rates have risen by at least 15 per cent since 1990, says a report released on the 15th anniversary of the Innocenti Declaration on the Protection, Promotion and Support of Breastfeeding.

Between 1990 and 2000, exclusive breastfeeding levels for children under six months in the developing world have increased by as much as three or fourfold in some countries.

UNICEF, the World Health Organization (WHO) and other child survival partners hailed this progress as they commemorated the adoption of the landmark Innocenti Declaration fifteen years ago today, at a meeting in Florence, Italy. At least 30 governments signed onto the Declaration in 1990, a document which set ambitious new standards for national support to breastfeeding.

“Exclusive breastfeeding is one of the most powerful tools we have to combat child hunger and death,” said UNICEF Executive Director Ann M. Veneman. “The Innocenti Declaration created a movement that has helped to save millions of lives and brought us closer to the Millennium Development Goals.”

This celebratory event is jointly organized by the Regional Authority of Tuscany and the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre with a wide partnership, including the Italian National Committee for UNICEF, UN organizations, as well as non-governmental organizations like the World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action, the International Baby Food Action Network among others and an international expert panel.

Veneman said the achievements since the Innocenti Declaration should inspire us to do more to reach out to vulnerable mothers and children. She praised the dedication of a vast international community of breastfeeding advocates, who have worked tirelessly to turn the promises of the Innocenti Declaration, and the Baby-friendly Hospital Initiative, into action.

Through their efforts, nearly 20,000 hospitals in 150 countries have become “baby-friendly”, more than 60 countries have laws or regulations implementing the International Code of

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Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes, and many countries have some form of national breastfeeding authority.

But the Innocenti partners warned that the original goal of the Declaration are still far from met. For instance, only 39 per cent of infants in developing countries are exclusively breastfed. Lack of awareness amongst mothers, and lack of support from health workers and communities, is largely to blame.

Breastmilk gives a baby ideal nourishment during the critical first months of life, as well as vital immunity against killer diseases like pneumonia. Babies should be exclusively breastfed from birth to six months, and then breastfed alongside age-appropriate, complementary feeding for two years and beyond.

Achieving this target would give an extraordinary boost to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It is estimated that almost one-fifth of all child deaths could be prevented if this target is achieved, saving over two million children per year.

The new Innocenti report published by UNICEF, WHO and other infant-feeding specialists, calls for greater government action and investment to protect exclusive breastfeeding.

It also warns that mothers and children are facing new dangers, including a growing number of emergencies and the continued rise of HIV/AIDS. Women need to be supported in providing the best nourishment for their children and governments urgently need to mainstream the latest strategies for HIV positive mothers and infant-feeding into national policies.

"In times of crisis, the right feeding practices for children are the key to saving lives," said Veneman.

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