



Ministry of Health

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

ON THE

MARKETING OF BREAST MILK SUBSTITUTES

PRESENTED TO PARLIAMENT BY HON. JOSEPH KASONDE, MP

MINISTER OF HEALTH

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Mr. Speaker, thank you for this opportunity to give a Ministerial Statement on the marketing of Breast milk Substitutes, and to clarify government position on the reported seizure of such products in Mansa Shoprite retail outlet.

Mr. Speaker, in May 2006, Government through my Ministry promulgated Regulations to monitor the negative practices in the marketing, sale and distribution of Breast Milk Substitutes. These Regulations aim to educate, promote and protect breastfeeding by regulating the practices in the marketing of infant and young child feeding products. The Regulations are as well, an important intervention tool in child survival programs. These regulations were issued in Statutory Instrument No.48 of 2006 under the Food and Drug Act Cap 303 of the Laws of Zambia.

Mr. Speaker, breast milk which must exclusively be given in the first six months of an infant's life fulfils all of baby's nutritional requirements. It is safe, clean, always at the right temperature, inexpensive and nearly every mother has enough for her baby. It also contains antibodies that help protect the baby against many common childhood illnesses. Further it is scientifically acknowledged that breast milk is superior to substitutes such as formula or animal milk. And those Children who are exclusively breastfed grow up into normal and healthier human beings.

Mr. Speaker, the WHO/UNICEF Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding 2003 recommends as a global public health recommendation that infants be exclusively breastfed for the first six months of life to achieve optimal growth, development and health. In line with the global strategy, my Ministry has developed a National Strategy (2006 - 2010) that aims at increasing exclusive breastfeeding rate and continued breastfeeding. Therefore, to meet their evolving nutritional requirements, infants and young children should receiving nutritionally adequate and safe complementary foods while breastfeeding continues for up to two years of age or beyond.

Mr. Speaker, despite this available information supporting breastfeeding, it is sad to note that some companies continue to disregard the appropriate marketing and distribution procedures of breast milk substitutes.

Mr. Speaker, the Statutory Instrument No.48 of 2006 was developed with the intent to facilitate the effective monitoring, compliance and enforcement of the regulations that prescribe the procedures for marketing of these products and in the process support exclusive breast feeding. In addition to the Statutory Instrument my Ministry has also developed a manual for Environmental Health Officers which prescribes in detail the procedure for inspection, Investigation, inquiry, collection of samples, seizure, destruction of substances and prosecution where a contravention occurs.

Mr. Speaker, you may wish to note that through out the process of developing the Statutory Instrument and development of the manual my Ministry had involved all the relevant stakeholders including retailers and manufacturers of infant foods. In addition sensitization meetings had been held to inform the affected parties on the implications of the SI No. 48 of 2006.

Mr. Speaker, the house may wish to note that although this particular SI was issued five years ago full enforcement has just commenced in 2011 as the Ministry had to train inspectors and to sensitize the various stakeholders in the Nation of the requirements for marketing of breast milk substitutes.

Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that in spite of all the effort by the Ministry and its cooperating partners to sensitize the manufacturers and retailers of these products there has been very little cooperation. Aggressive marketing techniques and often deceptive information is provided thereby misleading the public in believing that breast milk substitutes are better or superior to breast feeding. This is wrong and against the law and must come to an end.

Mr. Speaker, its not in the interest of the government to inconvenience or punish the children and the general public who depend on these products but all we are doing is ensuring that the law is followed and that marketing of these products is in compliance with the laid down procedures.

Mr. Speaker, all the products that were seized in Mansa had violated the provision of the law in particular regulation No. 11(a) which among other requirement states that, no manufacturer or distributor shall offer for sale a designated product if the container or label affixed to it:- includes a photograph, drawing or other graphic representation other than for illustrating the method of preparation and regulation No.12 which provides among others the label on a container of infant formula and other breast milk substitute shall bear the following information " breast milk is the Best food for you baby". The products seized in Mansa had violated these provisions.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion Government has considered the complaints raised by the people in Luapula province regarding the seizure of the breast milk substitutes which were being sold in violation of the law. Government has also taken into consideration that there is only one outlet for these products which is Shoprite in Mansa. The Ministry has decided to suspend the exercise for now and decided to call a stakeholders meeting this week to discuss the issue and chat the way forward. Mr. Speaker, I now lay on the table the said Statutory instrument and its accompanying manual.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you.