



International Women's Day 8 March 2011

Theme: *Equal access to education, training and technology: pathways to decent work for women.*

IBFAN Africa would like to join the world in celebrating the 100th anniversary of the International Women's Day (IWD). IWD is a global day celebrating the social, economic and political achievements of women from all walks of life. Furthermore, the world celebrates what women have accomplished in spite of sexism and reminds the world of the continual gender inequalities that need to be addressed even in 2011, the centenary year for IWD. The global theme for 2011 is: ***equal access to education, training and technology: pathways to decent work for women.***

Although women in the world, and especially in Africa, still face major challenges with a huge need in the areas of education, health and economic empowerment, there is much encouraging evidence of progress. Multiple initiatives are launched every day by African women as they participate in the development of their countries. Women are now found in all spheres of life, as social entrepreneurs, microfinancers, education and health specialists among others. They understand that they have to play a role in lifting themselves up in society and breaking the circle of poverty for themselves, their families and communities.

IBFAN Africa salutes this phenomenal achievement by women in their productive role as contributors to the economies of their countries however; the International Women's Day also serves to remind us that women play another important role – that of reproduction for their societies. Where these two roles intersect, we call on governments to strengthen or put in place policies and programmes that make it conducive for women to exercise their rights in these two areas. In order to undertake their

reproductive roles adequately, women need support to enable them to optimally nourish their infants through breastfeeding. This entails the provision of adequate maternity leave, and subsequent breastfeeding breaks on return to work. The International Labour Organisation in the Maternity Protection Convention 183 of 2000 stipulated a minimum period of 14 weeks paid leave and 2 half hour breastfeeding breaks when the woman returns to work. Many women still find themselves inadequately provided for in many countries.

Today IBFAN Africa reaffirms its commitment to promote gender equality and women empowerment. Furthermore, we would like to urge all relevant parties including national governments and civil society to ensure that the rights of women are protected in both their productive and reproductive roles.

IBFAN Africa

**Dhlan'ubeka House,
Ground Floor
P. O. Box 781, Mbabane
Swaziland
Tel: +268 2404 5006
Fax: +268 24040546**