



**Natalie Imbruglia Speaker Notes  
ECOSOC High-Level Segment  
'Partnership in Health'  
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Every minute a woman dies in what should be one of the most joyful times of her life: She dies in pregnancy or childbirth. For every woman who dies, 20-30 women suffer a serious birth injury. One of the more devastating of these injuries is obstetric fistula.

It doesn't have to be that way. It is well known what it takes to save the lives of these women. It is well known how to prevent and treat fistula. That is why I am standing here today.

Ladies and gentlemen, honoured representatives of the world's nations, friends and future partners.

As the Spokesperson for the Campaign to End Fistula, for five years I have been working to raise awareness and support for the devastating and neglected childbearing injury 'fistula'.

I first learned about fistula and the Campaign in 2005 from my friend Richard Branson, who was so moved by the topic that he asked me

to become an ambassador for his non-profit foundation, Virgin Unite to help raise funds and awareness for the UNFPA's Campaign to End Fistula. Since then I have had the honour of visiting fistula hospitals in Nigeria and Ethiopia numerous times.

In Ethiopia I met a very shy seventeen-year-old girl named Tegest who shared her story with me. She was in labour for five full days before her baby died. As if that were not enough, Tegest developed a fistula and her husband left her because of the smell of urine and feces. (pause)

During my time as a spokesperson I have met many women like Tegest – young and old - whose bodies have been torn apart from difficult pregnancies. I have heard the stories of births undertaken on a mud floor without any skilled assistance, of days of labour, and of health systems that are ill equipped to properly care for women, before, during and after pregnancy and labour.

But I have also met women who have reclaimed their lives after successful fistula operations. Like Sarah, whom we heard speak this morning.

Fistula is not something that people like to talk about. It is a very shameful thing for the girls and women affected. And, often, policy makers are not comfortable with it either. But the topic needs a voice, and I'm happy to lend my voice and give my time to End Fistula.

I have some powerful partners in Virgin Unite and United Nations Population Fund, UNFPA. Thanks to the money we've raised so far, our joint programme has contributed to the health, economic and social upliftment of thousands of women in northern Nigeria.

But it goes beyond that. The partnership between Virgin Unite, UNFPA and the Campaign to End Fistula is helping ensure that fistula is no longer something that is hidden, forgotten and unspoken. And it is getting on the agenda. Otherwise I would not be standing here today. *(pause)*

The good news is, that it is possible to end fistula and to relieve millions of women's suffering. Like maternal mortality, fistula is almost entirely preventable if women have access to reproductive health care as family planning, skilled birth attendants and emergency obstetric care if things go wrong. And for the millions of women who are already living with fistula, a simple surgery can normally treat the injury for only around 235 EURO. Sadly, most women with the condition do not know that treatment is available, or they cannot afford it.

This slot in the programme is called 'Partnership in Health' and I'd like to ask each and every one of you here today to become a partner: When you return home, I hope you will work to ensure that fistula and maternal health are properly addressed in your countries and integrated into your health care systems. I hope you will join me in making fistula a thing of the past.

Together we can make childbirth safe and motherhood joyful.

Together we can end fistula.

Thank you very much.