

**OPENING STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT OF ECOSOC
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PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF LUXEMBOURG TO THE UN**

**ECOSOC 2010 ANNUAL MINISTERIAL REVIEW: REGIONAL
PREPARATORY MEETING FOR AFRICA ON WOMEN AND HEALTH**

12-13 January 2010, Dakar, Senegal

Honourable Ministers,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to start by thanking wholeheartedly the Government of Senegal for hosting this Regional Preparatory Meeting for ECOSOC's 2010 Annual Ministerial Review on gender equality and the empowerment of women. It is an honour to address this august gathering and a particular pleasure for me given the close cooperation my country, Luxembourg, entertains with Senegal.

The issue of gender equality and empowerment of women is more relevant than ever before, as we stand only five years away from reaching the 2015 deadline for realizing the Millennium Development Goals. The attainment of MDG3 is indeed crucial to the timely achievement of all other MDGs. At the same time, the centrality of the "health MDGs" cannot be overemphasized. Out of the eight, three MDGs are focusing on health issues. This meeting is therefore deliberating on two of the most important aspects of the Millennium Development Goals which are women and health.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you know, the 2009 AMR focused on the global public health agenda. Allow me to draw your attention to some of the key messages that were repeatedly emphasized during the preparatory process and the Annual Ministerial Review itself. I will focus on those that are particularly relevant to this meeting.

First, the Millennium Development Goals can only be realized through integrated development policies. Hence, the goals of gender equality and better health should be at the core of all policies. For improving women's health, stronger policy coordination is required across a number of sectors, linking public health and other socio-economic policies. A key message from the Council was that "health should be pursued in all policies."

Second, in these times of multiple crises all efforts should be made to maintain or even increase social expenditure. Reductions will have a negative impact on healthcare provision and quality of services. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by

reductions on these and other social services, impacting their levels of health, education and nutrition, with even greater repercussions for the generations that follow. Maintaining health spending, in particular for the most vulnerable, is critical in order to ensure equitable access to care.

Third, there is a need to widen and strengthen partnerships for promoting collaborative efforts to meet the challenges of development. International cooperation is necessary to combat existing epidemics, and meet emerging and unforeseen threats. The exchange of best practices is invaluable in the areas of health systems' strengthening, access to medicines, training of health personnel, transfer of technology and the production of safe, affordable and effective medicines.

At the national level, the role of civil society organizations as service providers and advocates has to be taken into account, and their resources and services be fully integrated into national development plans and systems. Other forms of partnerships include collective business initiatives, multi-stakeholder or public-private partnerships, innovative financing mechanisms, research and development alliances, and integrated health system initiatives that rely on income from investments.

Fourth, Africa faces the biggest risk of failing to meet a number of MDGs, particularly as they relate to health. Africa's health systems are currently not capable of dealing with the magnitude of the health crisis facing the continent. On average, Africa has only nine hospital beds and two physicians per every 10,000 people. Health systems are seriously underequipped, underfunded, and overloaded. Africa's health systems must be strengthened in order to provide quality service delivery and achieve equitable outcomes.

This requires appropriate attention to health financing, human resources, improved facilities and infrastructure, procurement and distribution of medicines and vaccines, nutritional support and information systems.

Finally, health improvements are not possible without a trained and skilled health workforce. The severe shortage of capable health workers in Africa undermines health systems and equitable health outcomes. Recruitment and retention policies need to be reviewed, health workforce plans in remote areas be developed, and codes of practice to be finalized.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me focus also briefly on how the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the high numbers of maternal mortality are impacting realization of the health MDGs in Africa. While gains have been made in improving global health, little progress has been made to reverse the impact of HIV/AIDS, or reduce instances of maternal and child mortality. Nowhere is this more severe than in sub-Saharan Africa, where fatalities are rising at an unacceptably high rate. Women bear the greatest burden of poor health conditions.

Women's vulnerability stems from the social, political and economic disadvantages that they confront. Overall, women face a greater health burden than men because they lack autonomy in decision-making, limiting their voice and choice. This creates a vicious cycle of poverty and disempowerment, as gender inequality reinforces poor health outcomes, and poor health prevents women from taking an active role in their well-being.

As a global high-level forum with broad-based participation, ECOSOC is in a unique position to consider how wider social and economic policies are crucial to the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals and to look at the MDGs in a larger context.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

I look forward to your recommendations on how to tackle these issues, and how to devise and implement policies and programmes to get back on track towards meeting these critical goals. Your input is invaluable to the Annual Ministerial Review process and can make a difference in the lives of millions of African women.

I thank you for your attention.