



Hon. Lyn BROWN, MP
House of Commons, UK
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Madam Chairperson,

It is an honor for me to address this distinguished audience on behalf my colleagues present today and we are here representing the European Parliamentary Forum on Population and Development – a Parliamentary network that serves as a platform for cooperation and coordination in 25 Parliaments throughout Europe and focuses on improving sexual and reproductive health and rights at home and abroad.

We believe that the promotion of women’s rights, sexual and reproductive health and gender equality is absolutely fundamental to the fight against global poverty and the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals.

Our commitment to this cause is intellectual – we know that without gender equality, including the right and ability for women to control their fertility, the millennium development goals cannot and will not be realized, but our commitment is like yours – it is emotional.

In my second year as an MP I had an unforgettable experience. I visited Bangladesh and received an education from a number of fabulous young people in why the politics of sexual and reproductive rights is so very important. I had the privilege to meet a young mother. She was married at ten years of age and gave birth a year later. She wanted to talk to me about her desire to be a doctor. – She explained patiently to this uncomprehending MP that she had to find a career path now – Now she had the knowledge and wherewithal to control her fertility she would live longer – and therefore needed a career. She was so matter of a fact about her life trajectory she broke my heart. As we said goodbye she made me promise to remember her and help others like her in Bangladesh and elsewhere to give others what she now had – a real hope for a brighter future for her and her family. I promised and that’s why I am here. My colleagues have very similar stories to tell – hence their commitment to this cause.

Let’s face it there has been clear progress in the realization of the millennium development goals. There are many people like her – touched and changed by the programmes we support. More children are enrolled into schools in the developing world than ever before. Child mortality has declined globally.

But there is so so much more to do:

- In the short time it will take me to speak to you today – 3 women will have died from **treatable and preventable** complications during pregnancy and childbirth. An estimated half a million women a year.

- The number of people dying from AIDS worldwide is increasing. An estimated 2.9 million died in 2006. More than 15 million children have lost one or both parents to AIDS.
- And despite this - access to contraceptives remains low particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, - just 21 per cent.

I know these issues are familiar to you – these figures are ones we use on a daily basis – but this agenda is not about figures or percentages – it is about people – it is about that little girl in the Dhaka slum and millions of others like her across the world.

If we are to realize our Millennium Development goals then we need to re-commit and re- vitalise

And we know it is not going to be easy. The European Union is the largest donor of official development aid worldwide. My country, the UK, is one of the largest bi-lateral donors to population assistance on a global scale. But I and my colleagues are too well aware that in real terms the EU's ODA decreased by 1.6bn EUR between 2006 and 2007.

We are in an extraordinary difficult economic situation. The financial crisis has hit us all hard. But we must maintain current levels of aid. Anything else would cost more lives and in the end – let us be honest – will in the long run cost more money. No condoms – More HIV – more retroviral drugs, more orphans more poverty.

We, myself and my colleagues, think that the cost - human and financial - is too great for us to stop now – so we have pledged to go back home and campaign for the following six actions by our government:

- To ensure universal access to comprehensive SRH information, education and services
- An allocation of 10 per cent of ODA to population and sexual and reproductive health and rights policies. This sum has been agreed in the past – it is nothing new and simply reflects the Parliamentary Statements of Commitments made in Ottawa 2002, Strasburg 2004 and Bangkok 2006
- To encourage the inclusion of the new MDG 5 target in country health plans.
- To address the democratic deficit and actively involve parliamentarians as representatives of their people, government officials, civil society, private sector and donors in formulation, implementation and evaluation of their national strategies and actions to implement MDG 5.
- Improve access to Reproductive Health Supplies with a particular emphasis on the provision of a variety of family planning methods to suit different populations.

We know what it takes to fight global poverty successfully. Let us strengthen our commitment to guarantee that women's sexual and reproductive health and rights are improved and safeguarded worldwide. Let us do it because the cost is too great not to – Let us do it for the children in the slums of Dhaka – let us do it for the children in poverty everywhere.