

Oral Statement presented to the 44th Session of the Commission on Population and Development by Family Care International, an NGO in consultative status with ECOSOC, on the theme: “Fertility, reproductive health and development”

In millions of villages around the world, often unseen and mostly unacknowledged, women are the backbones of their families, the heart of their communities, and the key to the survival and education of children. Women — when they can control their fertility, when they are empowered and enabled, when their rights are recognized — are drivers of economic growth and sustainable development. Women’s health is a critical element, and perhaps the most important indicator, of a nation’s health, and of global health.

And yet a thousand women are allowed to die every day, needlessly, from preventable and treatable complications of pregnancy and childbirth, and many thousands more suffer grievous injury or illness. This relentless daily toll adds up to millions and millions of women lost in each generation; to millions of families left mourning their mothers, sisters, and daughters; to more communities mired in grinding poverty; to billions of dollars each year in lost productivity and stolen prosperity.

It represents one of the most urgently pressing health challenges faced by today’s world. It is also a tragic and infuriating reminder of the vast gender inequities that persist in so many countries and societies; and of the terrible gaps between rich and poor countries, and between rich and poor communities within countries.

Again and again over the past two decades, the world has promised to right this ongoing wrong: in 1994, with the historic ICPD Programme of Action; in 2000, with the establishment of the MDGs; in 2005, with the recognition that universal access to reproductive health is critical to solving maternal mortality and to fostering sustainable

development; and most recently, with the Global Strategy for Women's and Children's Health. Last September, behind the leadership of the Secretary-General, more than 90 member states, NGOs, and other partners committed to confront this urgent challenge, recognizing that investing in the health of women and children builds more stable, peaceful and productive societies, reduces poverty, stimulates economic growth, is cost-effective, and helps women and children realize their fundamental human rights.

Now, it is time to fulfill these oft-repeated promises. Doing so means providing universal access to high-quality reproductive health services; to antenatal care, skilled attendance at delivery, emergency obstetric services, and post-natal care; to contraception; to safe abortion; to diagnosis and treatment of STIs including HIV; and to comprehensive sexuality education. It means empowering every woman to control her own fertility, meeting the unmet need of more than 200 million women for family planning. It means building strong, well-functioning health systems, which must provide equitable access to sexual, reproductive, and maternal health services. It means exploring opportunities to improve the quality of and access to health care by integrating HIV and other disease-specific services with maternal and child health. It means confronting gender inequality, and addressing the special and pressing needs of young women, for whom pregnancy-related factors, including unsafe abortion, are the leading cause of death. Fulfilling promises means respecting the right of every woman to maternal and reproductive health.

Now is the time to keep our promises.

Thank you.

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