

Chairperson,

On behalf of MCCL and our life affirming Global Outreach program, I appreciate the opportunity to address you today.

Human beings are at the center of sustainable development, according to the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development. Respect for human life - and protecting the full human rights of all human beings -- must remain at the center as the international community addresses population issues in the post-2015 development agenda.

One ongoing challenge we must confront in the post-2015 agenda is maternal mortality and morbidity. An estimated 289,000 maternal deaths took place in 2013, and many countries will not meet the fifth Millennium Development Goal target of a 75 percent reduction in maternal mortality.

This problem is enormous, but we know how to solve it. We can save women's lives by improving maternal health care, including adequate nutrition and prenatal care, skilled birth attendants, emergency obstetric care, basic sanitation and clean water. These measures helped lead to a dramatic reduction in maternal mortality in the developed world during the 20th century. They helped lead to a 45 percent decline in maternal deaths worldwide from 1990 to 2013, according to estimates by the World Health Organization. Now these measures must be extended to the places where basic health care is still lacking.

Some say that legalizing or expanding access to abortion is necessary to protect the lives and health of women. That is not true. Maternal health depends on the quality of medical care, not on the legal status or availability of abortion. Countries such as Ireland, Poland, Chile and Malta prohibit most or all abortions and have a very low incidence of maternal mortality. Other countries permit abortion for any reason and have a very high incidence of maternal mortality. It is a matter of fact that legalizing abortion is not necessary to reduce maternal mortality.

We urge Member States to address the underlying problem of poor maternal health care in the developing world. The international community must focus on ensuring healthy reproductive outcomes in the post-2015 development agenda—without calling for the legalization or expansion of abortion.

Another challenge is posed by rigid population control policies, which are responsible for tremendous abuses of human rights. In some places pregnant women have been coerced into choosing abortion or even violently subjected to it. Such policies also contribute to sex-selective abortion and infanticide in areas where culture and tradition favor boys over girls, creating a gender imbalance that has already produced devastating social and demographic consequences, including sex trafficking and further violence against women. The importance of safeguarding mothers from all forms of violence and coercion must be emphasized in the post-2015 development agenda.

Chairperson, I thank you for this opportunity.

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Commission on Population and Development  
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