



## **Oral Statement by Elizabeth Maguire, President and CEO, IPAS<sup>1</sup>**

### **Agenda Item 4.**

#### **Forty-seventh session of the United Nations Commission on Population and Development**

**April 7-11, 2014, New York**

My name is Elizabeth Maguire. I am President and CEO of Ipas, a global nongovernmental organization working around the world to advance women's sexual and reproductive health and rights. Before joining Ipas in 1999, I served as Director of the Office of Population at the U. S. Agency for International Development, and in that capacity, I was also a member of the U. S. delegation to the 1994 Cairo conference.

While we can all point to many achievements since then, one of the greatest gaps is the persistence of deaths and injuries caused by clandestine or botched abortions. By a conservative estimate, more than 1 million women and girls have died and more than 100 million have been injured since 1994 – including infertility and other lifelong disabilities. It is intolerable for these deaths and injuries to continue in the 21<sup>st</sup> century when they are entirely preventable with available, low-cost technologies. The World Health Organization estimates that 47,000 women die each year – the equivalent of 200 large jet planes crashing with no survivors, each one equivalent to the Malaysia Airlines flight that has evoked great public concern in recent weeks.

Both the Secretary-General's report and the World Health Organization recognize that maternal mortality is higher in countries where abortion laws are restrictive. Furthermore, restrictive laws too often impose criminal penalties, including imprisonment of women and healthcare providers – a violation of basic human rights that was highly visible in El Salvador last week where women's leaders advocated for release of 17 women currently in prison for having sought abortions.

Mr. Chairman, the evidence is clear. If laws don't change, tens of millions of women will continue to risk their lives and health each year. In contrast, where laws are reformed, as in Ethiopia and Nepal more than a decade ago, an enabling environment is created, and women's health improves. In those two countries alone, millions of women and families have benefitted from improved access to safe abortion care along with contraception.

With these facts in mind, Dr. Nafis Sadik, Secretary-General of the ICPD and former Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund recently called for an "enlightened discussion about legalizing abortion..." Once we start that discussion, in her words, "we discover that mothers, sisters, wives, daughters, ordinary women from all states and stages of life are forced to choose between a pregnancy they cannot continue and an abortion they cannot avoid....The law should make it easier, not harder, for women to make that choice."

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<sup>1</sup>a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council

Thank you!