

Oral Statement: Meron Hagos, Marie Stopes International Ethiopia

I work for Marie Stopes International in Ethiopia, the country where I was born and have lived for the entirety of my twenty-five years. I have witnessed firsthand the need for quality, comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services in my country and the impact a government can have when it sets and implements ambitious national action plans.

From 2000 to 2011, the Ethiopian government took historic steps to create an enabling environment, which resulted in an increase in the contraceptive prevalence rate for modern methods from 6.3% to 29% and a fall in the total fertility rate. My government has reformed its laws to improve access to safe abortion under certain circumstances, which reduced the need for many women and girls to resort to life threatening measures that result in increased morbidity and mortality. I am proud of Ethiopia's progress in expanding access to sexual and reproductive health services and rights. As a young person and a provider of health services, I am honored to have worked in partnership with the government to achieve these results.

We must learn from, sustain, and build on this progress in Ethiopia and across the globe. Political will and commitment is critical. Ethiopia must continue to expand its reach whilst serving as an example of how low cost interventions, policy change and political will cannot only improve gender equity and health outcomes but also contribute to long-term economic prosperity.

Everyone must have access to a comprehensive package of sexual and reproductive health services. As well as being vital in their own right, sexual and reproductive health services offer a cost effective and convenient foundation for providing other essential services, such as cervical cancer screening and response to gender based violence. Targeted resources and strategies are needed to reach the most underserved communities. Achieving universal access to the highest attainable standard of sexual and reproductive health services and rights will require significant increases and innovations in health finance and infrastructure.

Unsafe abortion still remains one of the four leading causes of pregnancy related death and injury globally. One woman dies every eight minutes from an unsafe abortion—approximately 47,000 women each year, half of which are under 25. The impact of unsafe abortion is devastating for women and the families and communities they leave behind. These deaths are entirely preventable. Investing in preventative measures like comprehensive sexuality education and a range of family planning methods is key to reducing the number of unintended pregnancies and unsafe abortions. We must remove the unnecessary barriers that block access to information and services to prevent this senseless loss of life.

Solutions exist and the time to act is now! We must ensure the post-2015 development agenda fully integrates the findings and recommendations of the Global Review, commits to goals and targets that advance sexual and reproductive health and rights worldwide, and builds on the vision of the ICPD. Let us join together to create a future where every woman and girl has the right to choose whether and when to have children no matter who she is and where she lives.

Thank you, Chair.