

Mr. Chairman;

On behalf of the 200 chapters and 70,000 member families of MCCL and our Global Outreach program, I appreciate this opportunity to address this esteemed body today.

Twenty years after the adoption of the ICPD Programme of Action, maternal mortality and morbidity remain a very serious problem in large parts of the world. The World Health Organization estimates that 287,000 maternal deaths occurred in 2010 alone.

This problem is enormous, but we know how to solve it. We can save women's lives by improving maternal health care. This includes prenatal and antenatal 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 47 percent decline in maternal deaths worldwide from 1990 to 2010, 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. A recent editorial in the Bulletin of the World Health Organization acknowledges, "Illegal abortion is not synonymous with unsafe abortion." The legality of abortion is distinct from its safety, and maternal health in general depends on the quality of maternal health care, not on the legal status or availability of abortion.

Countries such as Ireland, 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 simply a matter of fact that legalizing abortion is not necessary to protect the lives and health of women.

Legalized abortion is often touted as beneficial to women, but a wealth of medical and psychological evidence suggests otherwise. Legal, or illegal abortion poses both short-term and long-term risks to the physical health of women. It can also seriously affect mental health.

Indeed, legalizing abortion does nothing to address the underlying issue of poor health care. Only by prioritizing improvements in maternal care and enabling healthy reproduction can we save lives and solve the problem of maternal mortality and morbidity.

We urge member states to make every effort to improve maternal health care in order to save women's and babies lives. Member states should reject all efforts to legalize or promote abortions and instead focus on maternal health care and healthy reproductive outcomes.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you for this opportunity.

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April 11, 2014

