



KEEPING OUR PROMISE

ADDRESSING UNSAFE ABORTION IN AFRICA

November 8-11, 2010 — Accra, Ghana

A Declaration for the Future of African Women and Families

Preamble

More than 500,000 women in the world die every year from pregnancy-related causes. The fact that more than half of these deaths occur in Africa underscores the need for comprehensive reproductive health care, including safe abortion services. Unsafe abortion contributes significantly to maternal mortality. Of the nearly 67,000 deaths each year from unsafe abortion in the world, more than half are in Africa, and millions of African women suffer serious injuries from complications from unsafe abortion. Young women in particular are disproportionately affected. Between 30 and 60 women 24-years-old or younger die each day in Africa from unsafe abortion. Preventing unsafe abortion, by increasing access to contraception and safe abortion care, will reduce these unnecessary deaths and injuries.

In addition to its devastating impact on the health of women, girls, families and communities, managing complications of unsafe abortion imposes enormous costs to African health systems, including health workers' time, drugs, medical supplies, and hospital stays.

Preventive investment in making contraception and safe abortion information and services accessible will decrease the incidence and consequences of unsafe abortion. Women's ability to make their own reproductive choices safely is also essential to poverty alleviation and economic development.

Restrictive abortion laws and limited access to safe abortion services are the major factors contributing to the high mortality of African women from unsafe abortion. Most African countries operate under archaic abortion laws imposed by former colonial powers that have long since changed the laws in their own countries. Most African women and health-care providers remain unaware of their legal rights and obligations related even to the limited circumstances – such as in cases of rape, incest or to save a woman's life – for which most African countries permit abortion.

Declaration

Women and girls--mothers and sisters, daughters and friends--are dying every day in Africa. We have the knowledge, the will and the technologies to prevent these senseless deaths.

All African governments have joined consensus on the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women, the Maputo Protocol and Maputo Plan for Action and other international agreements that call for addressing the public health problem of unsafe abortion, including by making safe abortion available to the full extent of local law. African governments have also committed to achieving the Millennium Development Goal to reduce maternal mortality. We must engage all stakeholders in partnerships to ensure that these promises are kept.

We the more than 230 participants of “**Keeping our Promise: Addressing Unsafe Abortion in Africa,**” meeting 8-11 November 2010 in Accra, Ghana, represent a cross-section of African Ministers of Health, Ministers of Women’s Affairs, parliamentarians, directors of health services, heads of reproductive health units, heads of academic institutions, youth activists, national and regional women’s groups, national networks engaged in promoting women’s health, nongovernmental organisations, religious organisations, professional organisations such as obstetrician-gynaecologists and nurse-midwives, lawyers, sociologists and media practitioners.

Representing more than 20 African countries, we call on African governments to:

- Give priority to reproductive health, including unsafe abortion, in programs to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, particularly Goal 5, “Improve Maternal Health”;
- Honor their commitments as stipulated in the Maputo Protocol on the Rights of Women 2003, particularly article 14 calling for increased access to safe abortion;
- Take concrete steps to implement the Maputo Plan of Action’s objective to reduce unsafe abortion;
- Work within existing legislation and health systems to ensure that high-quality, comprehensive abortion care is universally available, with special attention to reaching and responding to the needs of vulnerable populations.
- Initiate reviews of laws criminalising abortion, in line with specific commitments under international agreements;
- Include specific and increased funding for reproductive health and measures to address unsafe abortion in national and health-system budgets;
- Work to build a sustainable supply of medical technologies for contraception and safe abortion care, including medical abortion;

We call on multilateral and bilateral donor agencies, as well as international technical support agencies at all levels to:

- Direct more resources to preventing unsafe abortion and to making safe legal abortion available;
- Provide policy and technical support for expanding women’s access to safe abortion care.

We reaffirm our commitment to:

- Provide leadership to accelerate action to expand African women’s access to safe abortion care and end needless deaths and injuries from unsafe abortion;
- Recognize the unique barriers that youth and adolescents face when seeking safe abortion care and create safe spaces for discussion and youth-centered services;
- Strengthen partnerships at all levels to achieve these goals.

11 November 2010
Accra, Ghana