

DECLARATION ON MATERNAL HEALTH

We are a global coalition of young people reflecting diverse ethnic, cultural, economic, political and social backgrounds from all regions of the world. We have observed with concern the lack of progress made on MDG 5, Improving Maternal Health, which is currently the least achieved MDG. Maternal morbidity and mortality are largely preventable and must be addressed by person-centered health policies that focus on the needs of women in the context of maternal health.

As mothers, women develop society in a particular way through the transmission of life. Ensuring the health of the mother and child during pregnancy and at the moment of delivery is central to the development of society. Women's education and access to health care are key indicators of social progress. High maternal death rates are indicative of social and medical failure, and each death has a devastating impact on the family, the community, and economic and social development.

Preventable complications or disabilities arising from delivery—such as obstetric fistula—can also result in long-term suffering for the mother and community. Death and disabilities arising from pregnancy and child birth often lead to decreased quality of nutrition and education for children, and lack of security and stability for the family because of the important connection between healthy mothers and healthy children. The tragedy of maternal mortality or morbidity has disastrous consequences for women, children and families.

The causes of maternal mortality and morbidity are limited: hemorrhage, infection, obstructed labor and hypertensive disorders. These causes can be significantly addressed through investment in skilled birth attendants, and provision of health education for women and families. Improved access to basic health care, nutrition, medicines and technology are the additional means by which maternal mortality and morbidity can be reduced and eliminated. These services can be provided in cost-effective ways, and delivery systems to reach rural and marginalized communities can and should be prioritized. A knowledge-based health care system empowers women, particularly by ensuring adequate fertility literacy, which enables women to understand and access basic health care.

It is imperative to mobilize resources and strengthen political will to promote maternal health. Essential programs to ensure healthcare for mothers must be given priority in the development and funding of local, national and international health initiatives. Maternal health concerns all individuals since it is necessary for the development of healthy and prosperous societies. We call upon the international community to prioritize maternal health in its efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, as agreed in the Millennium Declaration. We commit ourselves, in solidarity with governments, international institutions and civil society, to achieving the goals outlined in this Declaration, to promoting maternal health as a necessary component of fostering authentic development, and to upholding the dignity of all persons.