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Opening Speech at the conference

Global Partners in Action:
NGO Forum on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Development
Invest in Health, Rights and the Future

2 September 2009, 2.00 pm, Estrel Hotel, Berlin

Check against delivery!

Introduction

- It is a great **pleasure** for me to be able to welcome you all here in Berlin today.
- It is not quite one year since the joint **decision was taken with Thoraya Obaid** to come together with the NGOs for a review of what has been achieved in the 15 years since Cairo and to look ahead to the future.
- I **thank** all those who have helped make this conference possible, in particular the steering group of 16 NGOs from all over the world plus UNFPA and the BMZ.
- **Civil society is a central engine of development!** The ideas and demands of NGOs often show us the way ahead.
- **Without the active support of the NGOs, there would not have been a final document in Cairo back in 1994.** They gave discriminated groups a voice.

I. Health creates future

- Today we are not just **15 years on from Cairo**, we are also **6 years away from the target date for the Millennium Development Goals**.
- Five of the eight Millennium Development Goals address demands made in the Cairo Plan of Action. And it is not certain that we will achieve them. The **economic and financial crisis is threatening the progress that has been made** in the fields of education and health.
- That is why, at the press conference this morning, I launched the **“Berlin Clarion Call: The Spirit of Cairo Lives On”**.
- My focus here is on **four key concerns**:
 1. Realising **women’s rights**
 2. Bringing about universal **access to health services**
 3. Intensifying political and financial **engagement in infant and maternal health**
 4. Honouring **ODA commitments**

- Investments in health – particularly in women’s health – are investments in every country’s future.
- **Health plays a key role in development:** only healthy people are able to help themselves.
- Sexual and reproductive health care is a prerequisite for sustainable development and is hugely important for our future.
 - It determines the **start of each new life**. And it may determine whether the end comes much too soon.
 - It has a decisive **influence on the state of health within a society**.
 - It has a major impact on how the **rate of population growth develops**.
- The way a country addresses the issue of the right to sexual and reproductive health also shows whether a society allows young women and men to make their **own decisions about their future**. Or whether they are denied this right.
- Because that is what is at the heart of this: the **freedom of every human being to decide** whether and when to have children and how many children she or he wishes to have, and it is about having **access to health services** that enable people to make those free choices. These conditions must be put in place before we can speak about living lives of dignity.
- **Since Cairo 1994, important advances** have been made in the field of sexual and reproductive health:
 - Improved **access to family planning** means that the number of children per woman has halved in the last 40 years.
 - In 17 African countries, national legislation has made **female genital mutilation** a crime punishable by law.
 - In northern Africa, and in eastern and south-eastern Asia, the **maternal mortality rate** has been reduced by a total of 30% since 1990.
 - However, we must **admit** that, particularly when it comes to gender equality [MDG 3] and also tackling **infant and maternal mortality** [MDG 4 and MDG 5], much, much more needs to be done.
 - There are still **1,500 girls and women** dying each day somewhere in the world because they fell pregnant.
 - There are still many governments that **deny** the poorest and most disadvantaged **access to reproductive health services**.
 - There are still millions of women for whom **terrible acts of violence** are part of daily life.
 - There are still 70,000 women who die each year as a result of **unsafe abortions**.
 - There are still **500,000 women** who die **each year** from complications related to pregnancy or childbirth. Most of them would still be alive if they had had the right medical care!
- Behind all these facts and figures are personal fates. Every single one should be a wake-up call, forcing us to take action. **There must be no forgotten MDGs!**
- We particularly need to act now because of the **accumulation of crises which the poorest people are experiencing as innocent victims**:
 - Last year’s **financial and economic crises** pushed up to 100 million people back into extreme poverty.

- **Climate change** is encouraging the spread of dengue fever and malaria (diseases of the poor), particularly in Africa.
- The **food crisis** leads to malnutrition and under-nourishment, which in turn weaken immune systems, making people more susceptible to infectious illnesses.
- **José Saramago**, a Portuguese writer and Nobel laureate described the link between poverty and illness as a problem of justice: *“If such justice did exist, not one more human being would ever die [...] from so many diseases that are curable for some, but not for others.”*
- That is what this is about: **global justice and solidarity**.

II. Berlin Clarion Call

- You see how important the “Berlin Clarion Call: The Spirit of Cairo Lives On” is. We need to
- **Realise women’s rights!** Self-determination and realising women’s rights are the central key to progress being made on the issues of population development and health care. Every form of **violence against women** such as female genital mutilation or the terrible mass rapes in eastern Congo **is absolutely unacceptable**.
- **There must be universal access to health services.** Bringing about **affordable access for all people without discrimination** to sexual and reproductive health services and information must be our highest priority. That includes:
 - modern methods of family planning
 - affordable drugs
 - HIV/AIDS prevention
 - treatment and care for people living with HIV
 - safe methods of abortion in line with human rights
 - If we are to achieve these goals then **social protection systems** will have to be developed.
- **Intensifying political and financial engagement in infant and maternal health.** I expressly support the Global Consensus for Maternal and Newborn Health with its goal of saving the lives of six million mothers and newborns up to 2015. The G8 also welcomed the Consensus just a few weeks ago in L’Aquila. What is needed now is concrete action!
- **Honouring ODA commitments.** Particularly in times of economic and financial crises, which hit the poor particularly hard, we need to honour our ODA commitments. On top of that, the German government has made 1% of its national economic stimulus programme available for development policy measures. I call on others to follow our example.
- These measures require financial support from the international community. However, a great deal also depends on the values, political decisions and priorities of the countries themselves.

III. Promoting reproductive health within German development cooperation

- **Germany’s development cooperation is heading in the right direction!** We are supporting reproductive health and family planning programmes in 40 partner countries. Between **2005 and 2007**, bilateral development cooperation **funding almost doubled** (just under 100 million euros a year).

- Over the past 10 years the **funding for health has almost tripled** (680 million euros in 2008).
- **2 concrete examples**
 - In **eastern Congo** (North and South Kivu Provinces) we are engaged in efforts to **reduce sexual violence**. According to UN figures, since 1996 more than 200,000 women, men and children have been the victims of mass rapes.
 - In **Kenya** we are supporting a **voucher system for health services**. This system makes it possible for poor women to get access to family planning and the services of trained birth attendants. So far these services have helped almost **50,000 women** to give birth safely, bringing healthy babies into the world.
- Sexual and reproductive health and rights are a **topic of our development policy dialogue**. Both with **partner governments** and at the international level. For example, in 2006, I personally protested to the Government of **Nicaragua** about the **ban on “therapeutic abortions”**. That is an issue that we are continuing to pursue.
- Within **G8** circles and within the **European Union** I have successfully lobbied for women’s rights, family planning and health.

IV. Conclusion

- I am convinced that **sexual and reproductive health creates future**. In order to ensure that this future offers a good quality of life for all, women’s human rights and their right to self-determination must be observed!
- We have travelled a long way together over the last 15 years. But we have not yet reached the end of our journey. We must continue together with the aim of creating a better and more just world.
- I wish you successful discussions over the next few days. Be creative, innovative and demanding. **Fill the Berlin Clarion Call with life!**