



## **Statement at the 44<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN Commission on Population and Development on behalf of EPF – the European Parliamentary Forum on Population and Development**

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Your excellencies,  
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour for me to address this distinguished audience on behalf of my four parliamentary colleagues present today. We are here representing the European Parliamentary Forum on Population and Development – a parliamentary network that serves as a platform for cooperation and coordination in 29 parliaments throughout Europe and focuses on improving sexual and reproductive health and rights at home and abroad.

In many European countries we are facing issues of decreasing fertility and aging populations, whereby specific measures are required such as support to young families and young women to combine work and family life.

However, in this intervention we are focusing on global sexual and reproductive health issues. We want to state that we believe that the promotion of women's rights, sexual and reproductive health and rights and gender equality is absolutely fundamental to the fight against global poverty and the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals.

Ladies and gentlemen: in 1994 in Cairo, 179 Governments agreed that every person has the right to sexual and reproductive health. This shifted population policies from numbers to the **matter of choice**. Not politicians, not governments, not religions or churches, not mothers-in-law but the woman herself should take the decision about how many children and when she will have.

And still now, there are still an estimated 215 million women that have no access to modern contraception. Approximately 1000 women are dying every day from complications of pregnancy and childbirth, while many of these deaths could have been prevented. We now have the world's largest-ever group of adolescents moving into the 15 to 24-year age group; they also have an unmet need for family planning.

I know these issues are familiar to you and these figures are the ones we use on a daily basis. But this agenda is not about figures or percentages – it's about people. It's about this one woman, living in a rural area in a developing country. She is about to give birth, but starts having complications. Her family has no means to arrange transport for her to the nearest hospital. She bleeds... and she dies... leaving behind the baby and perhaps 2 or 3 orphaned children of hers. A simple intervention or a blood transfusion would have saved her life.



How can we allow this to happen in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? We know what has to be done, but the question is why don't we do it?

1000 women a day is an equivalent of 2 to 3 Boeings 737 crashing every day and yet this news does not make it to the television! Because women die silently, and dead mothers don't cry.

**This shows that although the right to sexual and reproductive health has been proclaimed, it is far from being universally respected. In addition, we want to stress that SRHR is not only important from a human rights perspective but even more from a public health perspective.**

From a human rights and from a public health perspective it is key to prevent unplanned and unwanted pregnancies through provision of modern contraceptives. This is not a discussion between for or against abortion, no one is favouring abortion as it is something that we all want to avoid. This is about choice.

As parliamentarians, I believe that we have an important role to play. We can hold our governments accountable for their political and financial promises.

We have just heard the Report of the Secretary General about the flow of financial resources for the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action. It examined the levels of donors' and domestic expenditures for population activities. The good news is that the donor assistance has been increasing steadily over the past years. Developing countries have also mobilized resources and the trend is going upwards.

However, this is not nearly enough! According to the latest research, we would need to double our efforts in funding the ICPD Programme of action if we want mothers and babies to stop dying. The total costs of investing in modern family planning and maternal and newborn health would be USD 24.6 billion, an increase of USD 12.8 billion annually. This amount represents only USD 4.5 per capita!

I urge the present delegates and their governments:

- to ensure access to a full range of affordable sexual and reproductive health services, information and supplies, including services for young people and their involvement in shaping their youth policies
- to guarantee age-appropriate and comprehensive sexuality education
- to introduce measures guaranteeing equality and equity between women and men, and to implement them
- to put in place policies and funding both domestically and within the development assistance that would guarantee the full implementation of the Cairo Programme of Action.

A well-known professor of obstetrics and gynaecology, Professor Fathalla from Cairo University, has rightly said: "Women are not dying because we do not have the ability to save their lives. They are dying because we" – that is, we the politicians – "have yet to decide that their lives are worth saving." I urge the delegates to listen



carefully to the debate and to the evidence! I am sure that we all believe that women's lives are worth saving, so let us work for it! And let our work be guided by evidence and science and be based on human dignity and equity, not on traditional and cultural practices that are often harmful for girls and women, but never for men.

And finally I would like to call on all countries to introduce and commemorate Mother's night in advance to Mother's day that we celebrate every year. This night should remind us about all mothers that have died in childbirth and cannot celebrate with us any more.