



PRESS RELEASE

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Forum on Women's Health and Rights Opens With Claim on Economic Stimulus Funds

BERLIN, September 2 — Activists from 131 countries convened here today to recharge a global movement for women's health and rights, opening with an appeal from a leading government minister for countries to earmark 1 percent of their economic stimulus funds for development needs.

Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul, Germany's Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development, issued a ten-point call for new investment and political commitment on behalf of women and girls worldwide.

"We call for special protection for the poorest and weakest, particularly in these times of economic and financial crisis," she said at a news conference at ministry headquarters. "The economic stimulus programmes being implemented by donor countries should therefore allocate 1 percent of the funding to development policy measures."

More than 400 delegates to the *Global Partners in Action: Non-Governmental Forum on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Development* began three days of meetings at the Estrel Conference Center to evaluate 15 years of work on those issues since the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) issued its landmark Programme of Action in Cairo.

"An additional dollar invested in voluntary family planning comes back at least four times in saved expenses," said Thoraya Ahmed Obaid, executive director of UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, which is co-sponsoring the Forum with the German government. "It would cost the world only US\$23 billion per year to stop women from having unintended pregnancies and dying in childbirth, and to save millions of newborns—less than 10 days of the world's military spending."

Gill Greer, Director-General of the International Planned Parenthood Federation, called on conference participants to demand renewed action from their governments. "By insisting that governments keep their promises of 15 years ago, and by showing that sexual and reproductive health is a cost-effective long-term investment, we are playing an essential role in this process," she said.

The three-day conference brings together representatives of NGOs who are leaders in providing key sexual and reproductive health services to women and girls around the world. To help make the Cairo Consensus a global reality by the 2015 deadline for achievement of the Programme of Action, participants will identify key actions

needed from policymakers, donors and developing country governments. Conference findings will contribute to United Nations observations of Cairo@15 later this year.

“The challenges today are perhaps greater than those of 1994,” said Greer. “These include a world financial crisis, climate change, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, increasing conservatism and fragmented health systems.” A woman dies every minute from complications of pregnancy and childbirth—more than half a million deaths per year—and another 10 million suffer injury or disability.

Greer noted that more than 200 million women now want but have no access to modern methods of family planning while demand for contraception and condoms is expected to increase 40 percent by 2050, in part because of HIV/AIDS.

Young people under 25 are the largest youth generation in history – more than 1.5 billion people. “Those born in 1994 are now 15, on the cusp of their adult lives,” she said. “They will all need comprehensive health education and services.”

In her *Berlin Clarion Call: The Spirit of Cairo Lives On*, Minister Wieczorek-Zeul called for recognition of women’s human rights as key to sustainable progress on economic development, and for universal access to sexual and reproductive health information and services by 2015, the target date that the ICPD Programme of Action shares with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The minister also called for universal access to measures to prevent and treat HIV/AIDS, low-cost or subsidized health and social services, greater investment in infant and maternal health, stronger partnerships with civil society, greater attention to population dynamics, an end to discrimination in access to and use of health services, and pursuit of the MDGs beyond 2015.

Other speakers at the opening news conference included Helen Clark, Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme; and Laura Villa-Torres, Associate for Youth Programming of Ipas and a founding member of *Decidir*, a youth-oriented NGO based in Mexico City.

A podcast of the audio portion of the opening press conference will be available at www.globalngoforum.org