

Lawmakers vow to take urgent measures strengthening reproductive health and rights



28 October 2009 – Parliamentarians from some 115 countries pledged to promote sexual and reproductive health as well as women’s rights to decide how and when they give birth, at a United Nations-backed gathering which wrapped up today.

The two-day gathering in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, saw hundreds of legislators and ministers support the principles and goals of the landmark International Conference on Population and Development (**ICPD**) held in Cairo in 1994, when 179 governments explicitly recognized sexual and reproductive health as a human right.

“We are here to ensure that greater progress is made to advance human rights, including the right to sexual and reproductive health, and to hold governments accountable,” UN Population Fund (**UNFPA**) Executive Director Thoraya Ahmed Obaid said yesterday at the fourth global parliamentarians’ conference on population and development.

UN estimates in 2005 showed that, every minute, a woman dies of complications related to pregnancy and childbirth, adding up to more than 500,000 women dying annually, and almost all in developing countries.

“Participants unanimously adopted the Addis Ababa Statement of Commitment, in which they pledged to exercise their oversight responsibilities to break the silence around gender discrimination and to promote sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights,” UNFPA said in a news release.

The delegates said that although some progress has been made in achieving universal access to reproductive health and a sharp reduction in maternal deaths by 2015, advances have been slow in many countries.

In addition, the urgency to act has been heightened by conflicts, foreign occupation and emerging issues, including climate change, demographic challenges, environmental degradation, and the food and financial crises.

Around 400 parliamentarians attending the conference committed to supporting accessible and affordable health services that promote family planning, HIV prevention and the health and well-being of women and girls.

The participants also pledged to increase funding to at least 10 per cent of national budgets and development assistance budgets for population assistance, and to review laws and practices that still restrict access to sexual and reproductive health.

The Addis Ababa gathering followed three similar global conferences in Bangkok in 2006, Strasbourg in 2004 and Ottawa in 2002.

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