

Your Royal Highness, Princess Haya Bint Al Hussein, Honourable Ministers of Health, distinguished guests and dear colleagues,

On behalf of UNICEF, I would like to thank Her Royal Highness, for honouring us with her presence, today. We are immensely touched by Your hospitality and inspired by Your commitment.

I would also like to pay tribute to your Excellences the Ministers of Health, and country delegations and the partner agencies who have joined this high level meeting and have contributed to the richness of the discussions held yesterday, with your analysis and country experiences. .

A special thank you to WHO's Regional Office, and to my friend Dr. Ala'a – for taking the lead in organizing this important meeting, and for your true spirit of partnership. In the last two decades, there has been progress in improving maternal and child health in all countries of the region. But for the thousands of women and children who continue to die every year this is not enough.

What is so remarkable about this impressive gathering is that we are all united by one common purpose: a common mission: that of accelerating the progress towards saving the lives of mothers and children.

Our resolve and collective commitment is founded on

- the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women which came into force in 1981,
- Also on the Convention on the Rights of the Child which came into force in 1990,
- more recently the UN Secretary General Global Strategy for Women's and Children's Health launched in 2010
- And finally, the Call to Action for Child Survival known as A promised renewed launched in June 2012, where the global community pledged to scale-up action for reducing maternal newborn and child deaths. To date more than 170 countries have signed the pledge and in the Middle East and North Africa region 15 out of 20 countries are among the signatories and we

are delighted that the United Arab Emirates has also signed the pledge.

The challenges we face today are not only in terms of saving the lives of mothers and children but also in sustaining consolidated progress made to date. This becomes critical when financial resources are constrained and the investments made are threatened to be cut.

As we look forward and join hands to accelerate progress in reducing maternal and child deaths, and embracing the vision outlined in this conference, I would like to highlight four areas:

First, let us refocus all our action and investment on addressing the needs of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable groups in rural and urban areas. It is not only a moral imperative, but it has been proven to accelerate national development, and bring a higher return on investments. We have no choice. We must address the disparities in the coverage of the high impact interventions. We need to pay particular attention to the adolescent girls who face multiple deprivations, lack of education, poor nutrition, hard labour and early marriage.

Secondly, while recognizing the excellent results that the frontline health workers do on ground, let us make it a priority to better understand and analyse the many administrative, logistical and institutional bottlenecks. While we know technically what to do, progress in the most disadvantaged areas has been hampered because of long-standing, unresolved issues such as lack of adequately trained staff, lack of logistic means, malfunctioning supply chains and lack of adequate infra-structure, etc.

Thirdly, let us agree on the need to invest in strong information and monitoring systems that inform local and central decision-making. Political will is needed to collect more comprehensive and disaggregated data to track trends and to monitor performance. We need to know not only how many women and children we are reaching, but also how many we are failing to reach, who the most vulnerable populations are, and what the most efficient and cost effective way to reach them is. In a nutshell, we need to put data to work for mothers and children. Without this information, thousands of women and children will continue to fall through the cracks.

Fourth, our attention should also be directed to child and maternal survival, not only coverage of health interventions. These include better nutrition, safe water and improved sanitation, access to education, and stronger mechanisms to protect children and women from violence,

exploitation and abuse. It is only through integrated approaches that address the underlying factors affecting health – that we can ensure higher return on investment as well as sustainability of results.

Finally, partnership for results is central for the success of our common endeavours. This already exists. Let us build on and expand our existing alliances with community based organization, youth groups and other stakeholders.

Your Royal Highness, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

UNICEF is delighted to join hands with WHO and UNFPA and is fully committed to continuing to support the country efforts in saving the lives of women and children.

The time to act is now. The draft Dubai Declaration provides us with a renewed sense of urgency and mission. We must seize the moment.

Thank you.

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