



MEDIA RELEASE

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SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH OMISSION "DISAPPOINTING"

A crucial UN Declaration released today at the UN DPI / NGO Conference "Advance global health – achieve the MDGs", held in Melbourne, received support from NGO groups but for many the Declaration overlooked the priority issue of access to sexual and reproductive health which is vital to achieving not only MDG 5 but all the MDGs.

"We commend the UN Conference for producing a Declaration that covers so many important and needy areas, but to completely ignore sexual and reproductive health diminishes the outcomes and runs contrary to an internationally accepted MDG goal" said Ian Howie, Board Member of Australian Reproductive Health Alliance and former Country Representative of the United Nations Population Fund.

"Ensuring commitment to MDG 5b – ensuring universal access to reproductive health services - will not only save women's lives but also improve the lives of their children, families and greater communities" said Sumie Ishii, Chair, Asia Pacific Alliance for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights.

While sexual and reproductive health NGO groups support the conference's commitments to achieving the MDGs there is disappointment at the omission of the rights of women to access vital life-saving health services.

Moreover, the exclusion of sexual and reproductive health, including family planning, is inconsistent with other UN declarations as enunciated by former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan who said, *"The Millennium Development Goals, especially the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, cannot be achieved if population and reproductive health issues are not addressed. In order to address these issues we must work to further promote women's rights and invest in...reproductive health and family planning"*¹.

Despite Kofi Annan's pronouncement, NGO groups made repeated attempts over the last three weeks to ensure the message of sexual and reproductive health was reflected in the final UN Declaration, regrettably, the omission remains.

Not only is sexual and reproductive health vital to achieving MDG 5: "Improve Maternal Health" but is fundamental to the achievement of all MDGs such as Gender Equality (MDG 3), Infant Health (MDG 4) and MDGs relating to hunger, poverty and education.

NGO groups working to achieve global access to sexual and reproductive health believe that global health will never be achieved until women and men have access to the full range of sexual and reproductive health rights, information and services.

Otherwise the half a million women who die from maternal causes related to pregnancy and childbirth will continue to be compounded.

"Why is it that we at this UN Conference cannot say that 215 million women should have access to contraception so that they can plan their families, space their births and avoid sexually transmitted diseases? Surely this is a fundamental right!" said Ian Howie.

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For all media enquiries and interview opportunities as per below, please call Claire Maloney, Marie Stopes International Australia on 0431 279 785

¹ Message to the 5th Asian and Pacific Population Conference, Bangkok