



The MDGs and Sexual and Reproductive Health E-Bulletin September 22, 2005

Summit Outcome Adopted

The World Summit outcome document was adopted at 7:50pm on Friday, September 16, with world leaders reaffirming their commitment to “achieve universal access to reproductive health by 2015” and calling for the integration of reproductive health into strategies to achieve the MDGs (¶ 57(g)). This is an important achievement on many levels: it not only obligates all governments to continue working toward achieving universal access to reproductive health, it requires them to incorporate reproductive health services in development plans and policies at the national level. And it is a symbol of political will, showing that governments support the inclusion of this goal as a target in the MDG Framework.

There were also other important gains in the outcome document, including commitments to:

- increase resources to strengthen health systems in developing countries, so that they have the personnel, infrastructure and supplies necessary to achieve the health-related MDGs (¶ 57(a));
- increase resources for and commitment to combating the HIV/AIDS pandemic, including by increasing the capacities of adults and adolescents to protect themselves from HIV; expanding coverage of prevention, treatment, care, and support services, with the particular aim of reaching the goal of universal access to treatment by 2010; increasing the affordability of drugs; eliminating stigma and discrimination; and ensuring long-term investment in research on vaccines and microbicides (¶ 57);
- identify and implement “quick impact initiatives” (¶ 34). Recommended by the Millennium Project, “quick impact initiatives” could bring about dramatic short-term results as countries work to achieve the MDGs. Although not explicitly recognized in the outcome documents, one of the seventeen quick wins recommended by the Millennium Project is to “expand access to sexual and reproductive health information and services, including family planning and contraceptive information and services, and closing existing funding gaps for supplies and logistics” (Millennium Project, Investing in Development 26);
- promote gender equality and eliminate gender discrimination including by implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and eliminating gender inequalities in education; guaranteeing women’s rights to own and inherit property; ensuring equal access to reproductive health; ensuring equal access to labor markets, employment, productive assets and resources; eliminating discrimination and violence against women and girls, including by ending impunity; and promoting women’s increased representation in decision-making bodies (¶ 58);
- establish policies to ensure adequate and sustainable investment in health and other basic services (¶ 25(a)); and

- adopt and begin implementing comprehensive national development plans by 2006 to achieve the MDGs and other development goals (¶ 22(a)).

Yet governments missed key opportunities to improve women's and adolescents sexual and reproductive health. They failed to recognize the links between access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health information, education, services, and supplies and HIV prevention and treatment. They failed to recognize the disproportionate impact of HIV and AIDS on women and young people and make specific commitments to reduce their vulnerability to HIV infection or the barriers they must overcome to access treatment, care, and support services. And they failed to reaffirm the importance of protecting and promoting reproductive rights—the cornerstone of the ICPD Programme of Action.

Despite these shortfalls, this outcome document represents a global consensus that universal access to reproductive health is essential for development. As advocates, we must now hold our governments accountable to ensure that this goal is realized.

The official outcome document is available online: <http://www.un.org/summit2005/>.

Eight countries emphasize the importance of reproductive health; isolated US issues reservation

In their five-minute national statements delivered during the Summit, eight countries made specific references to the importance of reproductive health for achieving the MDGs or improving maternal health: the Bahamas, Cambodia, Finland, Gambia, New Zealand, Sweden, Tunisia, and Tuvalu. In a written statement, the EU also expressed support for sexual and reproductive health and rights. Another 20 countries discussed maternal health and 57 discussed HIV/AIDS. While sexual and reproductive rights advocates had hoped for a stronger show of commitment to sexual and reproductive health and rights in statements during the Summit itself, most economic and social issues were overshadowed by more political concerns, such as the state of multilateralism and the future of the United Nations.

While the U.S. did not publicly oppose the language on reproductive health during negotiations in the lead up to the Summit, they did issue an explanation of position on this issue after the document was adopted by consensus on Friday night. Their statement noted that “The United States understands that reference to the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and the use of the phrase “reproductive health” in paragraphs 57G and 58C do not create any rights and cannot be interpreted to constitute support, endorsement, or promotion of abortion.” While this reservation only affects the United States, it shows once again how isolated they are in the face of world opinion. No other country expressed reservations on the outcome document.

There is also a need to improve access to sexual and reproductive health particularly in relations to maternal health and HIV/AIDS.

Maatia Toafa, Prime Minister, Tuvalu

New Zealand will continue to advocate for the strengthening of women's equality and empowerment, and sexual and reproductive health and rights, which are critical to the achievement of the MDGs.

Rosemary Banks, Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations, New Zealand

It gives us cause for pride that the results achieved in Tunisia on the path of reform, development and modernization over the past two decades are in line with the development objectives set by the Millennium Summit, particularly in terms of reducing the rate of poverty, improving the gross domestic product, spreading education throughout the country, strengthening gender equality, promoting reproductive health, and integrating the principles of sustainable development into national policies.

Abdelwaheb Abdallah, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Tunisia

Ensuring reproductive health and rights are crucial in all aspects of development.

Tarja Halonen, President, Finland

As we continue on this course, we recognize that universal access to sexual and reproductive health and the protection of reproductive rights are critical in achieving the MDGs.

Al Hadji Yahya Jammeh, President, The Gambia

We welcome the goals of the International Conference on Population and Development of achieving globally the reproductive health services before 2015.

Samdech Hun Sen, Prime Minister, Cambodia

If we are to reach the Millennium Goals, more resources are needed for women's and children's rights, sexual and reproductive health, the fight against HIV/Aids and environmental protection.

Göran Persson, Prime Minister, Sweden

We therefore welcome the strong commitment at this high-level meeting to fully implement the measures contained in the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS, as well as commitments regarding the provision of resources for prevention, treatment, care and support and access to reproductive health. We must put ourselves back on track to achieve our goal of reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS by 2015; these commitments are a right step in that direction.

Frederick A Mitchell, Minister of Foreign Affairs & the Public Service, Bahamas

[The European Union] further recognizes that the MDGs cannot be attained without progress in achieving the Cairo goal of universal sexual and reproductive health and rights. In this context, the EU strongly supports a subsequent technical process to examine how best to incorporate related targets and monitoring indicators under MDG 5. Furthermore, we underline the importance of gender equality and thus the full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

The European Union

The full text and webcasts of national statements are available online:

<http://www.un.org/webcast/summit2005/statements.html>

Briefing Cards: Millennium Development Goals and Sexual and Reproductive Health

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Calendar of Events

September

20-25

International Women and Health Meeting (New Delhi, India)

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