



INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION
OFFICE OF THE PERMANENT OBSERVER TO THE UNITED NATIONS

Third Committee

Agenda item 63:
Promotion and protection of the rights of children

Statement by Mr. Alessandro Motter
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United Nations
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Mr. Chairperson,

Among the rights of children, none is more paramount than the right to good health from the moment of birth onward.

Ninety-seven per cent of all maternal and child deaths occur in sixty-eight countries in the world. Only 16 of these priority countries are on track to reach Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 4 on child survival. Despite some progress, change is slow and disappointing. Africa remains a particular focus of concern – at least half of all maternal and child deaths take place in sub-Saharan Africa.

Recent years have seen growing attention paid to maternal health and child survival. Efforts of international, regional and national actors combined to raise awareness, support initiatives and most importantly track change. One significant result is that today it is possible to clearly identify in a country what the situation is, where the gaps lie and where measures, if taken, can make a significant difference in the lives of women and children. Change is therefore possible but for it to happen there is a need for political will and the translation of that will into political and legislative action. What better calling for parliaments?

In 2008, the Inter-Parliamentary Union and partners of the Countdown to 2015 Conference on Maternal, Newborn and Child Survival joined forces with the aim of enhancing parliamentary efforts to promote maternal, newborn and child health within the 68 priority countries.

On the occasion of the 118th IPU Assembly and the Countdown to 2015 Conference, both held in Cape Town in April 2008, special sessions for parliamentarians were organized. Men and women parliamentarians from around the world met with leading global health experts, policymakers, representatives from civil society and international organizations to address the urgent need for accelerated progress to achieve MDGs 4 and 5.

Discussions were lively, constructive and sparked much interest. Participants highlighted the importance of developing and strengthening health policies and systems, and ensuring a continuum of care to reduce maternal and child mortality. These actions require the adoption of enabling legal frameworks, the allocation of sufficient funds, and sensitizing and educating populations – all within reach of members of parliament.

Since then, the IPU, in cooperation with Countdown partners, has pursued its efforts to mobilize parliaments with targeted letters, sharing of information and support for national initiatives. Our objective is to support parliaments in overseeing government action, budgeting for maternal, newborn and child health, advocating nationally and internationally for the achievement of the MDGs, representing the voices of women and children, and legislating to ensure universal access to essential care;

We intend to closely follow initiatives taken by parliaments in this field and highlight them on the occasion of our annual Assemblies. The 120th IPU Assembly, which will

be held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in April 2009, will be the first occasion to take stock of progress made by parliaments.

I would like to conclude with a quote from Dr. Gertrude Mongella, President of the Pan-African Parliament, on the occasion of the IPU Assembly earlier this year. Opening the session on child survival and maternal health, she underscored the potential power of parliamentarians, saying that, "Care for mothers, newborns and children are at the heart of human progress and a country's well-being. We [members of parliament] are 44,098 globally. Can't we do something individually and collectively that can change the lives of mothers and children? We have the power. We have the voice. Do we have the courage?"

Parliamentarians can make a difference. The IPU is committed to supporting them in their efforts to do just that.