



Countdown to 2015:
OPENING STATEMENT
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- Ministers, Honourable Parliamentarians, Distinguished Guests, Colleagues, **on behalf of the Countdown to 2015 Core Group**, it is my distinct pleasure to welcome you to Cape Town and to this most important Countdown Conference. I wish to thank our host, the Government of South Africa, for the kind hospitality extended to all of us here this week.
- I would also like to thank our colleagues from Ministries of Health from 68 countries - representing almost 97% of the global burden of maternal and child deaths - who are taking time out of their busy schedules to spend time with us this week, to consider the Countdown findings and future actions.
- The Partnership on Maternal, Newborn and Child Health was born out of a rising global consensus that the world was **not on track** to achieve on time (e.g. by 2015) two of the MDGs, the MDG # 4 on child mortality reduction and the MDG # 5 on maternal mortality reduction.
- Indeed, giving birth should be a time of joy. But for more than half a million women each year, pregnancy and childbirth end in death. Furthermore, some ten million children under the age of five die each year from **largely preventable causes**. It has been estimated that 37% of overall child deaths – some 4 million – occur in the first four weeks of their lives.
- The PMNCH was also born out of the realization that the goal of improving maternal health is **as vital to children as it is to their mothers**. The death of a mother substantially increases the risk of death for her newborn child. To save these lives and maximize opportunities for healthy mothers and children, there **needs to be a continuum of care** that begins prior to pregnancy, preferably during adolescence; continues throughout pregnancy, childbirth and after delivery; and ensures care for children and adolescents in the crucial years of life. The required interventions can be made available to mothers and children through an effective health system that reaches them at home, in the community and at the health facility.
- Finally, we know that the **technical solutions do exist**, which if implemented at scale would achieve significant reductions in maternal, newborn and child mortalities.
- We gather in Cape Town this week to review the **most recent analysis of progress made by countries** in delivering proven interventions to



mothers, newborn and children. We will also examine progress in reducing maternal and child death rates.

- The bringing together of the Countdown initiative and the Inter Parliamentary Union is a unique opportunity for building accountability for mothers and children. **Political accountability**, after all, is the mean by which the MDGs will or will not be met.
- A special session is being held by Countdown and Inter-Parliamentary Union to facilitate discussions of Honorable Members of the Parliaments from both developing and developed countries and the Countdown partners.
- This is the beginning of a whole new collaboration to bring Countdown findings to the attention of policy- and decision-makers in countries. Parliamentarians as elected officials represent the voices of people, including women and children. In order to protect their rights to health, they need to have the best information and tools to devise strategies, develop budgets and plans. Countdown aims to bridge this understanding and enable them to truly play their part in this global fight and **to lead the change for women and children for better health.**
- The Countdown initiative is a collaboration of concerned public health scientists, policymakers and programme managers, within the UN and outside. Many are members of the Partnership. Their work started several years ago and will continue to 2015. The task of capturing key maternal and child indicators for the 68 priority countries - in easily-understood tables and figures - has been **an enormous undertaking**. On behalf of all Countdown partners, I offer heart-felt thanks to the scientists, analysts and writers who have devoted so generously their time and talents to this most worthy endeavor.
- Our speakers will present the most recent analysis of coverage of 22 proven interventions, and mortality. As you will hear, more countries are on track now than three years ago, but not many more. Trends in maternal mortality that would indicate progress towards MDG 5 are not available, but in most countries maternal mortality is high or very high. Rapid progress is possible, but much more can and must be done.
- We have a much larger task ahead of us. Our task is to take the findings of the Countdown report and translate them into action. We must work with those who hold power in countries (both rich and poor), who have the courage to make the decisions to challenge the status quo, and to guide the transformation processes necessary to accelerate progress towards the MDGs.



- These issues, and others, will be at the core of our discussions during these three days. Our discussions will also be informed by a number of panel discussions which will provide us all with a reality check of what matters most at country level.
- Bridging the gap between global attention and national action will take additional resources. During this Countdown conference, the Partnership will launch a Call for additional resources, in the amount \$10.2 billion dollars.
- During the next three days, let us marshal a dynamic that will fast track the changes required to ensure that the world will deliver on its promise to improve the lives of all mothers, newborn and children. Welcome to the Countdown. Thank you.