Ambassador Lewis Lukens  
Remarks  
International Family Planning Meeting  
Tuesday, November 29, 2011  
Dakar, Senegal  
(as prepared for delivery)

Salutations

My congratulations to the conference co-hosts, the Bill and Melinda Gates Institute for Population and Reproductive Health at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, and Senegal’s Ministry of Health and Prevention.

I also want to acknowledge the more than 30 international organizations including USAID, UNFPA, WHO, the European Commission, the African Union, the World Bank, the Hewlett Foundation, and the Packard Foundation, – all which have contributed resources, time, and expertise to ensure the success of this conference.

It is a real pleasure to be here today. Your efforts this week will stimulate new action and new innovations in the field of family planning. Your work will help women in low-income countries secure a better life for themselves and their
children. The ability to space births, and to determine – on your own terms – when to start a family, allows young women the opportunity to finish their education; it protects girls from the dangers of early childbirth; it allows women to have fewer children so they can take better care of themselves and of the children they choose to have; it allows women to be more productive members of the community; and it raises the likelihood that children will go to school and contribute to their community. Yet this most basic and most affordable of health interventions is sometimes the most unavailable.

For too long, political and donor support for family planning has languished. Though some believe that population growth isn’t important, we know that on October 31st world population reached seven billion, only 12 years after passing the six billion marker. That’s a lot of babies – a lot of young people with basic human needs, not to mention the opportunity to improve the world if they are provided the right health, education, and work opportunities. The global population is growing fast - will our nations have the resources to support the next billion?

Recent studies show that if the world doubled its investment in family planning and maternal and newborn health care, maternal deaths in developing countries could be reduced by 70 percent, and newborn deaths cut nearly in half. With statistics like these – how can we not act?

There are those who may think that family planning is concerned exclusively with women’s health. But that is not the case. Family planning plays a strong role in a nation’s economic well-being. When countries experience rapid population growth, high fertility rates can lead to a vicious cycle of inescapable poverty.
While high fertility rates do not cause poor economies, decreased security, or unstable environments, they do complicate the challenges countries face in trying to reduce poverty, achieve growth, provide education and opportunities for youth, and address increasing shortages of natural resources.

In October, Senegal – our gracious host this week – committed to increasing national health spending from 10% of its budget to 15% by 2015. Among other commitments, it proposed to increase the budget allocated to maternal and newborn and child health by 50% by 2015; declared its intention to create a national Directorate for Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health; and committed to increasing its contraceptive prevalence rate from 12% to 45%.

The government of Senegal has worked to increase availability and access to family planning materials, education, and information. Their important efforts have led to a decline in the country's fertility rate, an increase in urban and rural contraceptive prevalence rates, and a considerable expansion of family planning services to those individuals with unmet needs.

The United States supports these efforts. Through several new alliances and through President Obama’s Global Health Initiative, the U.S. government will continue to be the largest single contributor to reproductive health and have a dramatic, positive impact on maternal and child health, including increased access to contraception – for both women and men.

Advancing the rights of women and girls not only enhances their well-being and productivity, but also improves prospects for future generations. That’s why the U.S. has been an important international leader in family planning for more than 40 years – because family planning saves lives.
I applaud you and your passion.

And now it is my great honor to share with you a statement from Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. Having worked directly with the Secretary during the past few years, I know how deeply she cares about women’s issues, particularly the difficulties faced by women in the developing world and Africa.

When she spoke in Ethiopia in June this year, she reminded us that “the women of Africa are the hardest working women in the world.” As she said, we have to keep African women’s interests – like access to education and healthcare – at the “front and center” of all the work we do.

Family planning is an integral part of the work that we do with women throughout the world, and here is what the Secretary would like to say to you about this important topic.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE

WASHINGTON

November 29, 2011

Dear Friends:

On behalf of the U.S. Department of State, it gives me great pleasure to extend my greetings to those gathered in Dakar for the International Family Planning Conference. While I regret I am unable to be with you in person today, I thank you for your leadership and hard work, and for your commitment to providing family planning and reproductive health care and services to the women and families who most need them. With 53 million unintended pregnancies in the developing world each year, and 215 million women facing unmet needs for family planning, this is
the year we must commit ourselves to accelerating our efforts to ensure that all women have access to family planning and reproductive health care and services.

Family planning is the basic right of all individuals and couples to have the information and means to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing, and timing of their children, and my travels as Secretary of State have only reinforced my strong belief that continued U.S. commitment and involvement in this issue is of paramount importance.

I am proud to be a member of the global community of partners working to promote reproductive health and rights, united in our belief that voluntary family planning provides a solid foundation for all women to achieve their God-given potential. What is most impressive about this conference, and those of you in attendance, is the conviction we share to working with all our partners in the global community to achieve our common goals, for our community is much larger and more diverse than just state actors, it is all of us: NGOs, international organizations, civil society and private sector partners, and dedicated citizens. Those of you here today are on the front lines of this global effort, not only with your work, but through your efforts to change minds and attitudes, and the very circumstances that keep women and girls from reaching their full potential.

I have long believed that empowering women is the key to unlocking many of the challenges we face around the world. Our bottom line is and must remain the empowerment of women and young people to control their own sexual and reproductive choices. By improving access to reproductive health services, including family planning, we create a ripple effect that helps women care for their families, support their communities, and lead their countries to be healthier, and more productive.
The United States, through the Global Health Initiative and the good work of USAID, is committed to working with all of you to avert maternal death and disability, which is one of the greatest moral, human rights, and development challenges of our time, and is the world’s largest health inequity. I pledge to continue to do all in my power to contribute to ending the needless death and suffering of women from complications of pregnancy and childbirth, and I ask each of you to join me in pledging to do the same.

Your continued support and commitment is essential to fighting for the lives of women and ensuring today's young girls and boys live in a tomorrow that holds out great promise. Together, through our work, we possess the power to help foster strong, healthy families, and thriving communities and countries.

Thank you for your dedication and hard work, and please know you have my very best wishes for a successful conference.

Sincerely,

Hillary Rodham Clinton