As Largest Global Family Planning Conference Begins, Political Leaders Urge “Full Access, Full Choice”

Host country Ethiopia testifies to power of contraceptive information and tools to save and transform lives

Greater investments in family planning could reap a “Demographic Dividend” for the African continent

ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA, 12 November 2013—Heads of state and other global leaders today joined more than 3,000 scientists, health professionals and advocates from over 120 countries to open the third International Conference on Family Planning (ICFP 2013). ICFP 2013 is the largest-ever meeting focused on expanding access to family planning and contraception as a core pillar of saving and improving women’s and girls’ lives. Also today, 30 government ministers participated in a high-level meeting on how family planning investments can contribute to a “Demographic Dividend” for Africa’s economic growth.

Organized around the theme “Full Access, Full Choice,” ICFP 2013 takes place at a time of unprecedented global commitment to family planning. Speakers at the conference’s opening day underscored the importance of sustained political leadership to ensure that everyone who wants family planning information and tools is able to access them. Worldwide, more than 220 million women want to plan their families but do not have access to modern contraceptive methods that meet their needs.

“It is the strong show of commitment by world leaders that leads all of us to believe this is a real turning point for accelerating progress on family planning,” said His Excellency Hailemariam Desalegn, Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. Ethiopia was selected as the host for ICFP 2013 because of its successes in providing women with access to family planning. Over the past few years, Ethiopia doubled the percentage of women using contraceptives (from 15% in 2005 to 29% in 2011) and has pledged to more than double that percentage again (to 66% by 2015).

The health benefits of family planning include preventing unintended pregnancies, reducing unsafe abortions and lowering pregnancy- and childbirth-related death and illness—for both mother and child. Increased use of modern contraception by women who do not want to get pregnant has driven nations’ progress in meeting the Millennium Development Goal of improving maternal health and reducing child mortality.

Speakers at ICFP 2013 today also stressed the value of family planning for empowering women and developing national economies. Her Excellency Joyce Banda, President of the Republic of Malawi, addressing the conference via taped message, said: “Family planning is not merely a health issue, it is also a development issue and a human rights issue. Scaling up family planning services is one of the tools that can lead to greater achievements in social and economic development.”

Expanding family planning access and choice is the first step for African nations to achieve the Demographic Dividend, which refers to the long-term economic growth that can result from lower fertility rates. However, for this dividend to be realized, it must be coupled with investments in women’s and girls’ education, a productive workforce and good governance.
Her Excellency Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, Chairperson of the African Union Commission, said: “We must talk about family planning in the context of investing in our people. Our people and our women are the most precious resource any nation has.”

Her Excellency Yingluck Shinawatra, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Thailand, said via taped message: “For family planning to be effective it must be part of a rights-based population development and social policy. We need to look at the welfare of an individual throughout his or her life.”

ICFP 2013 is highlighting progress in expanding family planning access and choice since the July 2012 London Summit on Family Planning, when the global community pledged to reach an additional 120 million women with family planning information and services by 2020. Commitments made at the London Summit included new financial resources; improved supply and delivery systems; investments in contraceptive research; and policy changes such as laws that protect the health and well-being of women and girls.

ICFP 2013 continues through the end of the week, and each day will focus on a theme central to expanding family planning access and choice:

- **Achieving Equity through Women in Leadership – 13 November:** Speakers will spotlight female champions for family planning and the role of female leaders in promoting gender equity.
- **The Young and the Restless: Effective Teenage Pregnancy Prevention Programs – 14 November:** Dynamic youth speakers will address the importance of ensuring that young people have access to family planning information and programs that meet their unique needs.
- **Moving Forward: Progress and New Commitments – 15 November:** The final day of the conference will focus on progress and new commitments to expand contraceptive access and choice. The winners of the first Excellence in Leadership for Family Planning (EXCELL) Awards will be announced at the closing ceremony.

ICFP 2013 is jointly organized by the Ministry of Health of Ethiopia and the Bill & Melinda Gates Institute for Population and Reproductive Health at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

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**MEDIA RESOURCES:** Online media resources, including the press program and press releases, are available here. The ICFP 2013 plenary program is available online here, and the full conference program can be found here.

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