

**Special Session on the Countdown/ Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health  
during the 120th IPU Annual Assembly:**

**Statement by Dr. Nicholas Alipui, UNICEF Director of Programmes,  
on behalf of Countdown**

**April 7 (12:00- 13:00)**

Esteemed Chair, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen. It is an honour to be here today and address such a distinguished and diverse gathering. It is so encouraging to see so many parliamentarians present given the power you have to improve the lives of women and children.

Great progress has been accomplished over the past decades with child mortality plummeting from about 19 million in 1960 to slightly more than 9 million today. Yet more needs to be done. As we've heard, close to 10 million women and young children die every year because of a lack of the most basic health services.

While some countries have been successful in accelerating progress in reducing maternal, newborn and child mortality and morbidity, the situation in many countries is stagnating or even reversing. Sub-Saharan Africa bears roughly half of the world's maternal and child deaths, even though it only has 12 percent of the world's population. This burden is followed by south Asia, so that together sub-Saharan Africa and Asia contribute to over 80% percent of maternal and child deaths.

Reducing the world's child and maternal deaths is the mission of The Countdown to 2015, a collaborative effort of individuals and institutions that tracks progress of health interventions proven to reduce maternal, newborn and child mortality.

The Countdown to 2015 calls on governments and development partners to be accountable, identifies knowledge gaps and proposes new actions to reach Millennium Development Goals 4 and 5, to reduce child mortality, to improve maternal health and reach universal access to Reproductive Health services.

Countdown partners, in addition to UNICEF, include the Bellagio Child Survival Group, DFID UK, Family Care International, the International Pediatric Association, the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health, Save the Children, UNFPA, USAID, WHO, the World Bank and many others.

The first Countdown Conference, held in 2005, focused on child survival. The second conference, held last year in conjunction with the 118<sup>th</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Assembly, aimed to mobilize Parliamentarians from both developed and developing countries in support of policies and financial investments to reduce preventable maternal, newborn and child deaths in developing countries. This expansion was based on the fact that newborn health and survival is inextricably linked to maternal health and survival and that maternal mortality is a major gender equity issue.

The heart of Countdown to 2015 is focused on country-level action to increase coverage of key maternal, newborn and child health interventions in 68 selected countries covering 97% of the global burden of maternal and child deaths. Regularly until 2015, Countdown will produce a

report that summarizes the best and most up-to-date information on country-level progress toward the achievements of MDGs 4 and 5.

Each country profile presents the most recent available information on selected demographic measures of maternal, newborn and child survival and nutritional status, coverage rates for priority interventions, and selected indicators of equity, policy support, human resources and financial flows.

The Countdown Initiative is an encouraging development that accelerates progress toward achieving MDGs 4 and 5.

The success of this initiative depends on political commitment and investment. That's why your involvement, as Parliamentarians, is so profoundly important. And that is why I hope you join Countdown to 2015 by working to reduce maternal and child mortality with renewed vigor.

There are many ways that you as Parliamentarians can ensure that women and children do not continue to die because they don't have the most basic health services.

To raise awareness of the issue, you can invite UN organizations and national partners, including NGOs and professional associations of obstetricians, midwives and pediatricians, to present the latest data to Parliament along with concrete recommendations for action.

You can establish parliamentary committees of enquiry on maternal and child mortality.

You can ensure parliamentary health and budgetary committees prioritize basic health care for women and children – to ensure that all women and children have access to essential health care services -- and develop an investment case for reaching the health-related MDGs.

You can consider measures to reduce all financial barriers to access to care for women of reproductive age and children under 5.

You can initiate and support global and national calls to action for universal access to a basic survival package for women of reproductive age and children under 5 with guaranteed benefits.

You can ensure sound national investments in monitoring and evaluation to strengthen health information systems, including birth registration and household surveys where vital registration is not yet adequate.

And you can become national champions for maternal and child survival. It is unacceptable that every minute a woman dies from pregnancy and child birth-related causes. It is unacceptable that every three seconds a child perishes due to a lack of basic health care.

We must continue to work together, and scale up our efforts, to prevent these unnecessary deaths. Together, we can make the Countdown to 2015 successful.

Thank you.