

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

United Nations General Assembly Thematic Debate  
on the Millennium Development Goals, 1 to 2 April 2008

“Recognising the achievements, addressing the challenges  
and getting back on track to achieve the MDGs by 2015”

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## Statement: “The Right to Maternal Health”

Amnesty International welcomes this debate on achieving the MDGs, and in particular Goal 5 to improve maternal health. Adopting a genuine human rights-centred approach is crucial to achieving this goal.

One woman dies every minute and many more face long-term debilitating ill-health because of conditions related to pregnancy and childbirth. Almost all of the deaths are preventable. Human rights must be central to the analysis and the solution of maternal mortality.

States must commit to eliminating the underlying human rights violations that drive maternal mortality. These include discrimination, lack of accurate information, early marriage and female genital mutilation and other violence against women and girls.

The MDGs are inextricably linked and States should also recognize that they cannot achieve Goal 5 without achieving the other Goals. Many women die or suffer ill-health because they live in poverty (Goal 1); are denied access to education (Goal 2); and are marginalized (Goal 3). Maternal ill-health leaves children at extreme risk (Goal 4); and lacking sexual autonomy, women are particularly vulnerable to HIV/AIDS (Goal 6). Finally, women at risk of maternal mortality are living in unsustainable environments such as informal settlements (Goal 7) and are rarely consulted about how States can best address the issues which put their health at risk (Goal 8).

Amnesty International calls on States to achieve real reductions in maternal mortality by taking the following actions:

- o Eliminate the underlying human rights violations which increase the risk of maternal mortality.

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- o Ensure that women have access to accurate information about sexual and reproductive health and rights. International cooperation should further, rather than limit, access to information and means to prevent unwanted pregnancies.
- o Ensure that no one is denied access to emergency reproductive health services due to inability to pay. International cooperation should further, rather than undermine, the availability of adequately trained and compensated health professionals.
- o Use disaggregation tools to identify and address disparities and discrimination which put specific groups of women, such as minorities, at risk of maternal death and injury. The spirit of the MDGs requires that such efforts be made in developing as well as developed countries.
- o Promote the participation of women living in poverty in plans and decisions about the kind of health services which they need and want.

Maternal ill-health is both a cause and a consequence of poverty and frequently results from a range of human rights violations. Amnesty International therefore urges States to make human rights central to achieving Goal 5 and indeed all MDGs.