

**Keynote address**  
**by**  
**Shiv Khare, Executive Director AFPPD**  
**at the**  
**ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly**  
**(AIPA)**  
**on**  
**“Accelerating the Achievement of**  
**MDG-5 through the Role of Women**  
**Parliamentarians”**

**Phnom Penh, Cambodia**  
**10 March 2011**

Her Excellency Dr. Mrs. Bun Rany Hun Sen,  
Hon. Mrs. Khuon Sudary,  
Distinguished guests and friends,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to be here today to deliver the keynote on “Accelerating the Achievement of MDG-5 through the Role of Women Parliamentarians”. As we are all well aware, maternal mortality worldwide has dropped by one third since 1990. However, urgent action is needed if we wish to achieve MDG-5 by the target of 2015. The data are clear; every day approximately 1000 women die from preventable causes related to pregnancy and childbirth; 44% occur in the Asia and Pacific region; skilled care before, during and after childbirth can save the lives of women and newborn babies.

As noted in the 2009 Addis Call to Action “Maternal death and disability is one of the greatest moral, human rights and development challenges of our time and is the world’s largest health inequity.” Achieving MDG5 by the target date of 2015 can only happen with concerted effort to protect and fulfill everyone’s right to sexual and reproductive health. From the outset there has been a close relationship between the MDGs and the ICPD Programme of Action. Some of the MDG targets on maternal and child health and gender equality reflect similar aims as those contained in the ICPD PoA. However, the ICPD PoA also includes a wide range of recommended actions that governments can take to achieve the MDGs while implementing the ICPD PoA.

I have been asked to address the role of women parliamentarians in accelerating the rate at which we are achieving MDG5. However, while the focus today is on women parliamentarians we must recognize that the same roles must be upheld by all parliamentarians, both male and female, if we are to achieve the MDGs by 2015. It is well known that progress toward achieving both MDG5A (reducing the maternal mortality ratio) and MDG5B (universal access to reproductive health) are linked. Improving maternal health reduces newborn and child deaths and improving health services across the continuum of care will result in healthy mothers and children.

For those of you not familiar with AFPPD, we have been working with parliamentarians throughout the Asia and Pacific regions since 1981 on population and development issues. We work with parliamentarians, NGOs, and civil society organizations to inform, educate and motivate policy makers throughout the region on the linkages between increasing population and issues such as reproductive health, family planning, food security, water resources, sustainable development, environment, ageing, urbanization, migration, HIV/AIDS, and gender equality.

As an advocate for population and development issues AFPPD has organized various programmes such as the ‘Asia and the Pacific Consultation on Maternal Health and Rights’ which was held in Bali, Indonesia in August 2009. The objective of the meeting was to develop

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country-level action plans to advocate for increased allocations for maternal health and to identify innovative strategies to enable utilization of quality service by poor and excluded populations, including through developing partnerships between parliamentarians, media and other stakeholders. Using examples of action plans developed by parliamentarians at that meeting I will highlight five areas in which parliamentarians can help accelerate the achievement of MDG5 by demonstrating their political commitment. These are representation, legislation, oversight and accountability, budgeting, and advocacy.

1. Representing the voices of women and children is a key role of parliamentarians. It is vital that parliamentarians use their leadership positions to break the silence, foster dialogue and mobilize their constituents to promote MDG5, gender equality and the right to sexual and reproductive health. As an example, following the 2009 Bali meeting many of the parliamentarians returned to their home countries and took action to raise awareness on the issue. Cambodian participants at the meeting stated they would seek feedback regarding maternal and child health services from women and children focal points and beneficiaries in priority provinces where MMR remained high. Indonesian parliamentarians pledged to partner with relevant stakeholders, especially district health offices to improve data availability and utilization for budgets and programs to close gaps in service. Other actions parliamentarians can take specific to MDG5 include organizing discussions with young people to help shape reproductive health and rights policies and laws that address young people's needs, remove restrictive laws, speak out for MDG5, identify and seek support of other parliamentarians who will also champion MDG5, work to build cross party coalitions, adopt motions in parliament on MDG5, hold briefings and hearings in parliament to convince and engage MPs and political leaders, organize public events to sensitize the wider public and strengthen national commitment; and regularly meet with constituents to educate them on MDG5.
2. Legislating to ensure universal access to essential care is another key role parliamentarians can take to accelerate achievement of MDG5. Legislative action can include but is not limited to establishing committees to initiate and review legislation which facilitates maternal health; holding open hearings with government, civil society, private sector and other actors to identify legislative gaps, challenges and solutions; initiating a review of existing laws to address gender discrimination and eliminate legal obstacles that limit women's access to health care services; and ensuring that new legislation complements existing legislation. For example, AFPPD advocated for a review of population related laws and amendments in a number of countries through their national committees. At the 2009 Bali meeting parliamentarians from Bangladesh vowed to form a national committee for protection and enforcement of maternal rights

and Indian parliamentarians proposed formation of a core group of officials from different departments to work on a common platform.

3. Strengthening parliamentary capacity for oversight to increase accountability is a fundamental role for parliamentarians in achieving MDG5. This may be accomplished through parliamentary questions, parliamentary committee work, organizing field visits to facilities and projects in order to monitor and evaluate RH initiatives; working with auditors to monitor the implementation of legislation and policy; publicly questioning commitment to MDG5; holding colleagues to account for their commitments; and requesting regular financial reporting.
4. Parliamentarians can also help achieve MDG5 by ensuring adequate financial resources through budget allocation for maternal and child health. One of the most effective ways for parliamentarians to press for budget resources is by focusing on family planning as an investment in development rather than as an expenditure. Viewing budget allocations as an investment recognizes the value of women's and children's health as a human right. Budget spent on Maternal and child health is a proven and affordable means of saving the lives of women and children. It also makes economic sense as the investment has added political benefits including social stability and human security. And this investment also serves to improve the country's health system. Parliamentarians' actions in this area may include working with budget and finance committees to focus on health and MDG5; making MDG5 a budgetary priority; holding hearings with women and health associations on needs and priorities prior to budget debates; ensuring that national budgets are gender sensitive; or organizing an awareness raising event on MDG5 to increase political pressure during budget debates. During the budget process, parliamentarians can pay particular attention to health allocations, ask questions and monitor allocated amounts and their effective use; use health statistics to question levels of allocations made; and liaise with UN and other sources to access data to support the need for allocation.
5. Even when health services are available social exclusion, gender inequality, poverty, and violence all act as barriers to women trying to access health services. For this reason, parliamentarians must take a broader view and advocate not only for MDG5 but also those issues which have an impact on MDG5 including education, traditional practices, gender equality and partnerships. Parliamentarians' advocacy action may involve engagement with communities; ensuring new members of parliament are educated and briefed on MDG5; raising awareness about human rights and gender equality; publicly speaking out about against harmful cultural practices; developing partnerships with community advisors on a basis of common objectives, mutual respect and shared needs; holding regular meetings with partners in various Ministries and civil society organizations; and sharing information with the public and peers regarding MDG5 and issues which impact attainment of these goals. AFPPD has facilitated the creation of close working relationships between the national parliamentary standing committees and UNFPA country offices which has resulted in UNFPA financial support for the

activities of many parliamentary national committees. In Cambodia under person to person advocacy programme where parliamentarians were individually met and ICPD issues were discussed. It was extended to CCMS successfully.

Cambodian parliamentarians and CAPPD have played a significant role in enhancing parliamentary involvement in MDGs and they have also played a significant role through their participation at the regional and international level.

AFPPD has a mandate to work with CAPPD. We understand the important role Cambodian parliamentarians play in achieving not only MDG5 but all of the Millennium Development Goals. We are committed to fulfilling Cambodian parliamentarians' needs for information, motivation, and developing effective partnerships with other key stakeholders like UNFPA and UNAIDS. I'd like to thank the organizers of this conference for inviting me to speak here today. Thank you for your attention.