

MATERNAL MORTALITY: IMPLEMENTATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY: GUIDANCE ON A HUMAN RIGHTS BASED APPROACH IN THE CONTEXT OF THE POST 2015 DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

Side event co-sponsored by New Zealand, Colombia, Burkina Faso, OHCHR, UNFPA, WHO, Sexual Rights Initiative, Centre for Reproductive Rights, IIMHR

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Opening by Ambassador Amanda Ellis

Welcome distinguished panellists and participants to this critical panel discussion today. For Burkina Faso, Colombia and New Zealand this is an opportunity to work with partners and fellow co-sponsors OHCHR, UNFPA, WHO, the Sexual Rights Initiative, Centre for Reproductive Rights and the International Initiative on Maternal Mortality and Human Rights to continue the Council's important discussion and work on preventable maternal mortality and morbidity.

As we know all too well, the rates of preventable maternal mortality and morbidity remain unacceptably high. Among the Millennium Development Goals set to expire in 2015, the goal to reduce maternal mortality has shown some of the least progress. Regional disparities in maternal mortality rates are particularly striking, as countries in the global south are burdened with 99% of maternal deaths worldwide. Maternal mortality also tends to affect the most vulnerable sectors of countries' populations. However it isn't only the unacceptably high rates that should concern us, as any woman or girl dying of preventable maternal mortality is one too many. This is what our work in the Council has been about. A human rights based approach is about valuing women and girls, realising their rights and changing the social and political structures that disadvantage them.

As you know, since 2009 our three countries, together with many of you in the room, have worked to raise awareness of preventable maternal mortality as a human rights issue in addition to a public health and development concern. Last year, this work culminated in a very practical contribution to this discussion: the launching of technical guidance on a human rights based approach to preventable maternal mortality and morbidity.

Today we are looking forward to having a discussion on the implementation of the technical guidance and accountability for States human rights obligations with regards to maternal mortality and morbidity. Our work in the Council, and the work of treaty bodies, has been key to building accountability. As our governments and organisations increasingly turn their attention to the post 2015 development agenda, it is also crucial that we turn our attention to the gaps in implementation and accountability that still exist. We must learn what lessons we can.

It is now my honour to introduce our first speaker, who in fact needs little introduction. Deputy High Commissioner Flavia Pansieri has a long history in the UN system working on development and gender equality issues. Madame Deputy High Commissioner, I hand the floor over to you to set the scene for our panel.