

Statement by Dr. Peter Salama, UNICEF Representative to Ethiopia  
On the occasion of the African Leadership for Child Survival  
18 Jan 2013 at AU conference room

- Excellency, Minister of Health, Dr. Kersetebirhan Admasu
- Honourable Ministers, government representatives
- USAID Ethiopia mission director, Dennis Weller
- UN colleagues, and colleagues from other development agencies
- Civil Society Partners,
- Members of the Media
- Distinguished Guests

It is a real honour and privilege for me to be here today to deliver the closing remarks on behalf of UNICEF. In June 2012 – during the first Call to Action – Promise Renewed meeting in Washington D.C – Dr. Tedros had committed that Ethiopia would host an African Leadership for Child Survival Conference – linked to the AU summit. That promise is now fulfilled. So let me start by thanking Dr. Tedros and Dr. Kesete and all of the colleagues at the Ministry of Health and on the steering committee for making this All African meeting a reality and a success.

The pledge signed by the African countries present and the consensus reached by the conference are both significant and historic. The event has marked a new era for the African continent in which it is no longer acceptable for any child to die an untimely and preventable death.

Ladies and Gentleman, in terms of global child survival, there is much to celebrate. Today, more children survive to their fifth birthday than ever before. The global number of deaths among children under-five has fallen from around 12 million in 1990 to an estimated 6.9 million in 2011. The gains have been widespread. Diverse countries, ranging from low-income, middle income, but also high-income countries have radically reduced their under-five mortality rates in the past two decades – demonstrating that progress is possible across diverse economic and geographic contexts.

As we have seen at this meeting, in many ways the progress made in the health sector in Ethiopia as well as many other African countries has become a powerful global symbol of what can be achieved

in resource-constrained environments and has given many international partners renewed faith in the development enterprise.

As Minister Richard Kamwi from Namibia just highlighted - To accelerate progress we need to do some things differently. Dramatic reductions in preventable child deaths can be achieved through concerted action in five critical areas, outlined in the global roadmap- geographical focus, high burden populations, high impact solutions, gender equality and mutual accountability and financing. Dennis Weller has dealt with the high impact solutions area very well so I will focus on the 4 others.

First, the theme of equity, in all its dimensions, has come out very strongly through the conference conclusions on geography, gender equality and high burden populations. We know that as much as we have made global progress on child survival in recent decades so too have we seen an increasing concentration of child deaths in Africa which now accounts for around half of all the world's child mortality. These trends will be further compounded as births also become increasingly concentrated on Africa. Put simply, we cannot continue to achieve progress on global development goals without accelerating progress on this continent. In addition, we also know that within countries enormous progress can be achieved merely by ensuring that the poorest economic quintile of the populations has the same access to basic services as the richest quintile. Furthermore, maternal and newborn health are inextricably linked- while there is much we can do to reduce newborn mortality now, and I particularly liked Joy Lawn's 3 by 2 slide, we will not be able to fully address the 1 million newborn deaths, without linking newborn to maternal health. And nor should we try for women's health clearly deserves to be prioritized on its own merits

We have also seen in the opening presentations that the highest rates of death are now overwhelming in fragile states and conflict-affected countries and regions. This demands that our attention also be placed on governance issues and on human security. There is a major role here, not only for the United Nations but also for regional institutions- this is why the role of the AU will be even more paramount as we move forward on this initiative- indeed we are very hopeful that with the Ethiopia government taking over the chair of the AU in 2013, that maternal and child survival will be seen as not only a health and development issue but as a security issue. It seems auspicious that the African Leadership for Child Survival has taken place right before the AU heads of state meeting next week. I sincerely hope that the recommendations of this conference are shared with the AU leadership and head of states for their endorsement.

Second, through the theme of mutually accountability and financing, we have seen a strong focus on the ideas of developing robust monitoring systems to track results, national scorecards to provide

objective means of comparison, and more systematic attention being paid to analyses of bottlenecks at national and subnational level in order to both breakdown challenges into manageable components and also to be able to better track disparities within countries. UNICEF is committed to helping support the capacities of countries to conduct such analyses and tracking. We have seen at this meeting that resource constrained countries can reduce child and maternal mortality and in fact sometimes such constraints may spur important innovations. The effective use of available resources under committed leadership is very essential. But while we all can agree that it is not only about how much money we spend but about what we prioritize and how we spend it, we should certainly not forget that a major part of our mutual accountabilities relates to how we support health systems with sustained financing from both domestic as well as donor financing. This should also be a critical component of our monitoring agenda.

As many of your countries begin or will begin discussions on the post-MDG development agenda, I think we should also collectively anticipate and manage one major risk in this regard. It is clear much of the world's attention is turning to focus more on environmental issues including those of green economies, biodiversity, water and food security. At the same time, many of our ministers of finance still regard the social sectors as the non-productive sectors. I think we have seen from our session on stunting that in fact, nutrition, health and water interventions addressing such critical issues may in fact be some of our most productive sector in terms of preserving human capital and ultimately achieving sustainable economic growth. It will be up to leaders in this room to make such a case.

Finally, we have seen the strong leadership of African governments in this process. This is not an initiative led by UNICEF or USAID or any other partner. In an era of global health partnerships which have brought enormous new financing and momentum on certain issues but also carry real risks of fragmentation and lack of alignment, it is very refreshing to see that this initiative and the commitments being made are home grown. All countries have existing strategies and plans for improving maternal, newborn and child health. Integration of the ALSC/APR initiative with local processes, rather than setting up vertical mechanisms, will be important. Government should also coordinate efforts of various partners and the different initiatives such as APR, SUN, EWEC (Every Women Every Child), UNSG's initiative on commodities, the E8 for Malaria Elimination.....and synthesize them at the country level.

Indeed, one of the most exciting aspects of the meeting and the overall process for me is to have seen the peer to peer dynamic in action. I know the lesson learning and sharing of good practices from country to country will continue over the coming months and that many countries are planning study visits to other African countries. We should nurture this dynamic at all costs. I believe the seeds

of success and of sustainability have been planted by all of you at this meeting. Of course, at all levels of the organization, UNICEF remains 100% committed to accompanying you through the process of ending all preventable maternal, newborn and child deaths and thus completing the work begun under the child survival revolution.

I thank you.