



**Ambassador Lewis Lukens  
Remarks  
International Family Planning Meeting  
Tuesday, November 29, 2011  
Dakar, Senegal**

His Excellency the President of the Republic of Senegal,

Her Excellency the First Lady of Senegal,

Her Excellency the First Lady of Burkina Faso,

Her Excellency the First Lady of Namibia,

His Excellency the Minister of Health and Prevention of Senegal,

The Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund,

The Honorable Parliamentary Under Secretary of State of the United Kingdom,

The Dean of the John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health,

The Representative of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation,

Your Excellencies Ministers and Ambassadors,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

My congratulations to the conference co-hosts, the Bill and Melinda Gates Institute for Population and Reproductive Health at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, and Senegal's Ministry of Health and Prevention.

Your efforts this week will stimulate new action and new innovations in the field of family planning. Your work will help women in low-income countries secure a better life for themselves and their children. The ability to space births, and to determine – on their own terms – when to start a family, allows young women the opportunity to finish their education. It protects girls from the dangers of early childbirth. It allows women to have fewer children so they can take better care of themselves and of the children they choose to have. It allows women

to be more productive members of the community. And it raises the likelihood that children will go to school and contribute to their community. Yet this most basic and most affordable of health interventions is sometimes the most unavailable.

For too long, political and donor support for family planning has languished. It's already been mentioned that on October 31st the world's population reached seven billion. What hasn't been mentioned is that it took only 12 years to get from six billion to seven. The global population is growing quickly.

There are those who may think that family planning is only a subset of women's health. But that's not exactly the case. Family planning also plays a strong role in a nation's economic well-being. When countries experience rapid population growth, high fertility rates can lead to a vicious cycle of inescapable poverty.

While high fertility rates do not cause poor economies, decreased security, or unstable environments, they do complicate the challenges countries face in trying to reduce poverty, achieve growth, provide education and opportunities for youth, and address increasing shortages of natural resources.

In October, Senegal – our gracious host this week – committed to increasing national health spending from 10% of its budget to 15% by 2015. Among other commitments, it will increase the budget allocated to maternal and newborn and child health by 50% by 2015; create a national Directorate for Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health; and increase its contraceptive prevalence rate from 12% to 45%.

The government of Senegal has worked to increase availability and access to family planning materials, education, and information. Its important efforts have led to a decline in the country's fertility rate, an increase in urban and rural contraceptive prevalence rates, and a considerable expansion of family planning services to individuals with unmet needs.

The United States supports these efforts. Through several new alliances and through President Obama's Global Health Initiative, the U.S. government will continue to be the largest single contributor to reproductive health and have a dramatic, positive impact on maternal and child health, including increased access to contraception – for both women and men.

Advancing the rights of women and girls not only enhances their well-being and productivity, but also improves prospects for future generations. That's why the U.S. has been an important international leader in family planning for more than 40 years – because family planning saves lives.

And now it is my great honor to share with you a statement from Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. I worked directly with the Secretary the past few years, and I know how deeply she cares about women's issues, particularly the difficulties faced by women in the developing world.

When she spoke in Ethiopia in June this year, she reminded us that “the women of Africa are the hardest working women in the world.” As she said, we have to keep African women's interests

– like access to education and healthcare and family planning – at the “front and center” of all the work we do.

Here is the message the Secretary has asked me to deliver today:

Dear Friends:

On behalf of the U.S. Department of State, it gives me great pleasure to extend my greetings to those gathered in Dakar for the International Family Planning Conference. While I regret I am unable to be with you in person today, I thank you for your leadership and hard work, and for your commitment to providing family planning and reproductive health care and services to the women and families who most need them. With 53 million unintended pregnancies in the developing world each year, and 215 million women facing unmet needs for family planning, this is the year we must commit ourselves to accelerating our efforts to ensure that all women have access to family planning and reproductive health care and services.

Family planning is the basic right of all individuals and couples to have the information and means to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing, and timing of their children, and my travels as Secretary of State have only reinforced my strong belief that continued U.S. commitment and involvement in this issue is of paramount importance.

I am proud to be a member of the global community of partners working to promote reproductive health and rights, united in our belief that voluntary family planning provides a solid foundation for all women to achieve their God-given potential. What is most impressive about this conference, and those of you in attendance, is the conviction we share to working with all our partners in the global community to achieve our common goals, for our community is much larger and more diverse than just state actors, it is all of us: NGOs, international organizations, civil society and private sector partners, and dedicated citizens. Those of you here today are on the front lines of this global effort, not only with your work, but through your efforts to change minds and attitudes, and the very circumstances that keep women and girls from reaching their full potential.

I have long believed that empowering women is the key to unlocking many of the challenges we face around the world. Our bottom line is and must remain the empowerment of women and young people to control their own sexual and reproductive choices. By improving access to reproductive health services, including family planning, we create a ripple effect that helps women care for their families, support their communities, and lead their countries to be healthier, and more productive.

The United States, through the Global Health Initiative and the good work of USAID, is committed to working with all of you to avert maternal death and disability, which is one of the greatest moral, human rights, and development challenges of our time, and is the world’s largest health inequity. I pledge to continue to do all in my power to contribute to ending the needless death and suffering of women from complications of pregnancy and childbirth, and I ask each of you to join me in pledging to do the same.

Your continued support and commitment is essential to fighting for the lives of women and ensuring today's young girls and boys live in a tomorrow that holds out great promise. Together,

through our work, we possess the power to help foster strong, healthy families, and thriving communities and countries.

Thank you for your dedication and hard work, and please know you have my very best wishes for a successful conference.

Sincerely,

Hillary Rodham Clinton

Copies of the Secretary's letter are available in French and English as you leave this conference hall. Thank you for your attention. The US Government is proud to be associated with this conference. Best wishes for the week.