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Women Deliver Conference

SPEECH

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Speaker Moore, Sen Claire

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Senator MOORE (Queensland) (8.11 pm)—I seek leave to speak for 20 minutes.

Leave granted.

Senator MOORE—Last week in Washington the second Women Deliver conference drew over 3,000 people from over 140 countries to come together to talk about one key theme: ‘Delivering solutions for girls and women’. The plan was to ensure that the world, and most particularly the political leaders of the world, understood that the Millennium Development Goals cannot and will not be achieved without investing in women and that there is just enough time—five years to go—before we have to deliver on our aim. We need to invest strongly.

We know from the Women Deliver conference—which I was very fortunate to attend—that women’s wellbeing determines a country’s wellbeing. You cannot have a strong and vibrant country or economy without strong, healthy women. Women drive economic development. They operate the majority of small businesses and farms in developing countries. Women’s work makes everyone more productive. More of their own income goes on food, medicine, education and other family needs, and women contribute to economic growth. Their unpaid work at home and on farms equals about one-third of the world’s GDP. We know that when women survive, families thrive. Also we know through the number of contributions to the conference and by world awareness that there are tragic factors affecting the health of women.

In developing countries each year 215 million women who want to avoid pregnancy do not use effective methods of contraception. Pregnancy and childbirth complications are the leading cause of death and disability in young women. Nearly half of all pregnant women across the globe do not receive any skilled care. We know that over 20 million women have unsafe abortions and 10 to 15 million women suffer severe or long-lasting illnesses or disabilities caused by complications during pregnancy and childbirth. Maternal deaths are preventable—we know that. There is a global consensus on cost-effective solutions that include: effective family planning programs; skilled care for mothers and newborns before, during and after childbirth, including emergency obstetric care;

and safe abortion when and where that is legal. Delivering these solutions to the world means that we must prioritise young people, strengthen national health systems that deliver for women and advance and protect human rights for girls and women.

Investing in women makes sense right now and is essential for our future. It was said and agreed that investing another \$12 billion a year, for a total of \$24 billion, would fulfil the unmet need for family planning and provide every woman with the recommended standard of maternal and newborn care. That investment would result in reducing unintended pregnancies by more than two-thirds, preventing 70 per cent of maternal deaths, averting 44 per cent of newborn deaths, reducing unsafe abortion by 73 per cent and cutting disability adjusted life years lost to pregnancy related illness and premature death by 66 per cent.

Investing in women brings positive returns. It would return as much as US\$15 billion in productivity which is now lost to maternal and newborn death. It would improve public health for all by developing strong, accessible health systems, preventing unintended pregnancies and reducing HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. It would empower girls and women with greater opportunity for education and employment. Most importantly, I think, it would ensure that we strengthen families, communities, economies, nations and the world. This was the goal that was determined by putting in place the Millennium Development Goals—to strengthen families, communities, economies, nations and the world by reducing poverty.

The conference focused most clearly on women and on maternal and child health, particularly millennium development goal No. 5, which is to improve maternal health. Target 5(a) was to reduce by three-quarters between 1990 and 2015 the maternal mortality ratio and target 5(b) was to achieve by 2015 universal access to reproductive health.

The horror is that more than half a million women die each year in pregnancy and childbirth. Most of them die simply because there is not enough skilled routine emergency care. We need to ensure that across our globe we reduce the horror that, in places such as sub-Saharan Africa, one in 22 women has the risk

of dying during pregnancy or childbirth over their lifetime. This is compared to one in 8,000 women in the developed world. No-one can hear those stats and remain calm. No-one can hear those stats and remain less than angry. At the Women Deliver conference there was a great deal of professionalism, commitment, knowledge, frustration and anger, but overwhelmingly there was hope, because there is a chance for us to reverse this situation. There is a chance for us to work together to ensure that we can strengthen health systems and to ensure that women survive pregnancy and that children are able to be brought safely into the world.

Millennium development goal No. 5 was brought into focus most clearly I think through the last Women Deliver conference, which was two years ago in London. At that conference, which was subject to a great degree of debate and understanding, it was ensured that, by looking at the health of women and girls, we were in fact considering all the millennium development goals to which our nations had signed up, because you do not look at things in isolation. MDG5 is related to all the other MDGs. As maternal mortality strongly affects newborn mortality, progress on MDG5 will also influence efforts to reduce child mortality, which is MDG4. Progress on MDG5 is also linked to MDG6, which aims to combat HIV-AIDS and malaria as these are important indirect causes of maternal death.

During the Women Deliver conference we heard a great deal about the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, and we were fortunate a few months ago to have the leaders of the global fund here talking to our parliamentarians in this place to ensure that the horrors of HIV-AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis are being addressed effectively through a contribution by nations to the global fund. There has been an international call for donations to ensure that the global fund remains strong. One of the most impressive things about the global fund is that it looks most clearly at the effectiveness of the countries who are seeking the help. No money is given out unless there is effective planning, accountability and monitoring. We hear often the concern that giving money through the aid process is throwing money away, that there is no effective process to ensure that our money is well spent. Indeed, the global fund makes that assurance. One of the things that came out of the Women Deliver conference and the call to all nations who are in the position to be able to be donor nations is that we must continue to invest in the global fund.

Maternal mortality is a sensitive indicator of real inequality across the world. The only way that we can actually work together to make sure that we overcome poverty is to make sure that we have strong,

effective women's health. We had the chance because, throughout this area, it is most clear that our nations have signed up to be part of international causes of the Millennium Development Goals. At the Women Deliver conference one of the processes included a parliamentary forum. We had over 80 parliamentarians from across the world who had their own meetings. One of the frustrations of course was that there was so much on offer in the break-out groups and the various plenary sessions that it was very difficult to attend all the things you wished to. But the Women Deliver website will be providing information on the hundreds of workshops available for people to attend, all drawing together the best knowledge and the best professionalism and commitment to achieving real chances, allowing women to deliver.

The focus of the parliamentarians forum was on ensuring awareness raising but also on looking at movement forward. We know that the G8 and the G20 parliamentarians conferences and the G8-G20 summit of leaders of industrialised nations will be occurring in the next few weeks. In September world leaders gather for the UN high-level meeting to review the progress on the MDGs. The Women Deliver conference and also the complementary parliamentary forums were a chance to ensure that we had issues to hopefully be placed before the G8 and G20 but most importantly to put before the international high-level meeting in September to ensure that the call for action is heard and that it is clearly spoken. The parliamentarians at the Women Deliver conference committed to urging ministers across the globe—from developing countries and donor countries all together—to establish realistic, verifiable, annual action plans for reaching the individual MDG targets.

It is important also that donors and recipient countries alike target those MDGs which are falling most behind. To our shame, the MDG that is falling most behind is that to do with women's health. I have talked before in this place about putting real emphasis on this. We need to ensure that MDG5 is achieved; that means that there is a flow-on effect and that the other MDGs are achieved as well.

We call on governments to act upon the endorsed consensus on maternal, newborn and child health and we also want parliaments across the globe to have a priority setting on women's and girls' health at the local, national and global level. These issues should be debated freely so that they are not forgotten. We also talked about the need to speak out on women's and girls' health to raise awareness and to build knowledge. It is important that the facts that have been established are openly discussed and shared and that politicians—regardless of political parties, regardless of where they are meeting and regardless of whether they are

from federal, state or local levels—all talk about our commitment as a country to facing the issues of poverty in our globe.

It is important that we actually engage in the debate and that we include young people in all countries, because consistently in the debate the issues around adolescence are raised. We need to ensure that adolescent health is strong and that young women and men understand their own health needs and work together to ensure that they make correct choices and have access to the support that they need, medically and socially, in their own communities.

We also have to ensure that the budget is strongly focused, that it is determined and that there is follow-through, particularly now. Post the global economic crisis concerns, some major donors from across our globe have been pulling back. It is very important that we share the responsibility and that we maintain the dedication and the effective funding of the processes that are going to be put in place to make sure that there is an effective aid program. As I said earlier, there is an understanding that there needs to be an additional \$12 billion a year invested in women and girls. That is a large amount, but it can be achieved. As part of a donor nation community, we accept this responsibility and we take up our share. When those world leaders gather together in September to look at how the MDGs are progressing, it is absolutely essential that there is an understanding of the financial responsibilities and commitments of these last five years. We are now in 2010 and the world made a commitment that by 2015 we would have an impact on poverty. We now have a five-year period to make sure this is achieved, and we have that chance. There is hope, but it will need an open commitment of funding, and not just by governments.

One of the really important aspects of the conference was the launching of the Joint Action Plan for Women's and Children's Health by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. It called upon nations of the world to come together to ensure that we address these issues—but also private enterprise. One of the exciting aspects of the Women Deliver conference was the leadership shown by the Gates foundation. Bill and Melinda Gates attended the conference and committed \$1.5 billion from their foundation as part of the world working together to achieve the aims to which we have committed. That once again gives hope, but it also means that there needs to be so much more commitment into the future.

In the parliamentary forum we talked most about the idea of creating laws and policies with and for women and girls and about legislative and policy responsibilities. One of the core aspects of the Millennium Development Goals is the empowerment of women. It is focused on education, and we heard this

evening at another meeting upstairs in this place about a commitment to an education program in which we can all share.

But we also need the engagement of women and girls in the political process. Across the globe women have differing levels of direct involvement in the political process. When I was in Rwanda last year with Senator Humphries—I see him in the chamber—we were able to see the absolute joy that can be achieved when women are able to take up their role in parliament, supported by their own government. The Rwandan women, with the men in their parliament, have been able to prove that you can actually put in place local plans which actively engage women in the process. At the Women Deliver conference and also at the following parliamentary conference, parliamentarians from Rwanda were able to talk about the process they had put in place and how they expected that the greater involvement of women in their parliament would have a flow-on effect in terms of role modelling for women in communities and in ensuring that the economic wellbeing of the community was affected.

Consistently through the Women Deliver process we were looking at delivering solutions for girls and women. Part of that, of course, is engagement in political processes and working towards enforcing national laws to reduce gender inequality and gender based violence. One of the ongoing debates through this whole Women Deliver conference was the horror of the act of violence against women which permeates so many parts of our globe, and the way that we work together to ensure that women are safe, that women are healthy and that the political systems respect their rights. Their rights must be acknowledged as we work towards ensuring that women are part of the solution and are involved in the process of building, through their own strength, a greater future in our communities.

We also need to build alliances and coalitions amongst supportive members of parliament. I have certainly spoken before about the role of cross-parliamentary groups on population and development. When politicians have the support of other politicians at the local level who share a passion on these issues it gives them a greater strength and, as I said earlier, it allows the debate to be more widely discussed so that these issues are not allowed to fall off the agenda.

So, across the globe we have various parliamentary groups on population development who share knowledge and who interchange ideas and who can give support and show where things have actually been successful. Through the parliamentary groups on population and development we can see where change has been achieved, and that can encourage others to move forward. We also have to ensure that the key issues—women's and girls' sexual and

reproductive health and rights, and access to family planning, emergency obstetric care and safe abortion, where it is legal—are made regular agenda items during relevant bilateral, multilateral and international meetings and summits. It is essential that these issues of women's health are kept on the agenda and that where governments are meeting—where they are making decisions about aid allocation—it is never forgotten that the issues of women's health and women's strength are absolutely essential if we are going to have any chance of building a better, stronger world where poverty is reduced.

The pledge by parliamentarians at the Women Deliver conference was to carry out these actions and to systematically and actively monitor the progress we are making in doing so. As a first step, parliamentarians committed to communicating the results achieved through working with our respective authorities and in close cooperation with civil society and other key stakeholders in setting up national action plans to be presented during the UN high-level review meeting in September. We, as parliamentarians, committed to reporting regularly on this progress through our parliamentary groups and our regional networks. I was part of that commitment. I was not representing the Australian government; I was there as part of a UN process. But as a parliamentarian I am making a commitment that we will continue focusing on this cause.