Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen: it is a pleasure to be here on behalf of the High-Level Task Force for the ICPD.

We are at a crucial moment on the road to Post-2015. We know things must be done differently this time. If we are to eradicate poverty and inequality and achieve sustainable development, the new agenda must be rooted in human rights.

That means all human rights, for all individuals. We must affirm sexual and reproductive health and rights as essential to any sound and effective approach to development. These are universal issues, relevant across our life-cycles and in every country.

Sexual and reproductive health and rights are a matter of social justice – especially for women and adolescent girls. It is women and girls living in poverty who die from preventable causes – such as childbirth and unsafe abortion.

In sub-Saharan Africa, we have the highest number of maternal deaths in the world related to unsafe abortion. Every year:

- Of the world’s 20 million unsafe abortions, 5 million are in my region, and over a million of these are to adolescent girls.
- And beyond the lives affected, treating unsafe abortion complications costs our region nearly 1 billion dollars in lost income due to disability and death.

These costs are all preventable. Expanding access to safe, legal abortion saves lives and is one of the safest medical procedures. But legal restrictions rooted in gender discrimination put women and girls at risk and infringe on their human rights. Even where legal, abortion is not always safe, accessible or affordable. And where abortion is banned, women and girls with resources will find a way to get a safe procedure. Those without are doomed – to risk their health and survival, or be thrown in jail.

These are problems with solutions. Now is the time for visionary, bold political leadership. The lives and wellbeing of millions of women and girls depend on it.