

**Miguel Angel Moratinos**  
Foreign Minister  
Spanish Presidency of the EU

**Karel De Gucht**  
Commissioner for Development  
European Commission

27 January 2010  
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Dear Mr Moratinos and Mr De Gucht,

**Amnesty International report: "Giving life, risking death-  
Maternal mortality in Burkina Faso"**

Ahead of the European Forum Beijing+15, Amnesty International takes the opportunity to remind the EU of the crucial role it has to play in the advancement of women's rights, especially sexual and reproductive health and rights. Hosted by the Spanish Presidency, this Forum is set to assess the internal and external actions of the European Union (EU) on gender equality as well as the progress achieved.

In this context, Amnesty International publishes today the report "*Giving life, risking death – Maternal mortality in Burkina Faso*". Maternal mortality is the single biggest cause of death among women of child-bearing age in developing countries. In Burkina Faso, more than 2,000 women die every year from complications related to pregnancy and childbirth. Some women die because they cannot reach a health facility capable of treating them, or because they arrive too late. Many lose their lives because they cannot pay fees demanded by medical personnel. Others die because of shortages of blood, drugs, equipment or qualified medical staff.

During the last decade the Burkinabe authorities, with the help of the donor community including the EU, have devoted effort and resources to reducing the maternal mortality. Ambitious strategies have been developed and partially implemented in the context of the Millennium Development Goal 5 (MDG). However, women still face many hurdles: low status; lack of information on sexual and reproductive health and rights; social and economic barriers; geographic barriers obstructing access to health facilities and poor quality of treatment. Maternal mortality takes its major toll on the poorest and the least educated women.

Amnesty International calls on the EU to continue to support the government of Burkina Faso in its efforts to increase access to sexual and reproductive health and rights. These rights should also be considered in the implementation of the recent MDG contract signed between the EU and the government of Burkina Faso, and incorporated into the related review process of the country strategy paper for Burkina Faso.

Amnesty International calls on the government of Burkina Faso and to the EU to:

- **Allocate resources to maternal and reproductive health care equitably, prioritizing the poorest regions with highest mortality ratios.** In its development cooperation, the EU should especially encourage prioritization of the poorest regions with the highest mortality ratios.
- **Systematically reduce economic, physical and cultural barriers that prevent poor rural women from accessing life-saving reproductive and maternal health care.** In particular, the EU should support the efforts of the government of Burkina Faso to enforce the 1996 law banning female genital mutilation, a customary practice which is harmful to women and contributes to maternal mortality.
- **Provide accessible information to women about their sexual and reproductive rights and the right to health and ensure their meaningful participation in government decisions, including the evaluation and monitoring of current processes.** The EU should encourage the government of

Burkina Faso to take further commitments on these issues especially during the review of the Burkinabe national poverty reduction strategy. Access to information and participation of women should be considered as key elements of any EU support on good governance in Burkina Faso.

- **Ensure adequate monitoring of government policy to reduce maternal mortality, in order to promote effective planning and accountability.** The EU should consider the integration of specific indicators on maternal mortality in its new monitoring and evaluation mechanism of the poverty reduction strategy for Burkina Faso.

Maternal mortality is a health emergency that can be addressed and prevented if, in the spirit of the United Nations Human Rights Council resolution on Preventable Maternal Mortality and Morbidity, it is tackled as a human rights issue. The high rate of maternal deaths in many countries shows the denial of women's right to life, to non discrimination and to the highest attainable standard of health care and to information. All of these rights are set out in international human rights treaties and benefit from particular attention in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

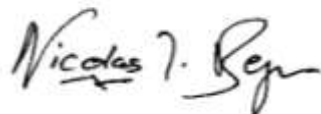
Following the Beijing Conference in 1995, the EU has committed in various instances to contributing to the promotion of gender equality in its external and development policies and to shaping a gender perspective towards the full realization of the Millennium Development Goals. And yet, in September 2008 the European Parliament adopted a resolution expressing strong concern over the lack of progress in reducing maternal mortality. Last November, the Council called in its conclusions to take further steps to advance women's empowerment, gender equality and gender mainstreaming in development cooperation.

Donors and particularly the EU have a responsibility to sustain the efforts of developing countries in their implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Plan of Action and in their efforts to reach the MDGs. Their role is to cooperate closely with the governments in a long-term approach, ensuring access for all women to adequate reproductive health services. In preparation of the MDG review, Amnesty International calls on the EU to:

- **Strengthen the protection of human rights within the existing MDG framework**, and ensure the prioritization of access to essential health care for the most marginalized and vulnerable.
- **Promote a rights perspective to end the crisis on maternal mortality** including the protection of sexual and reproductive rights, access to information and meaningful participation.
- **Provide adequate monitoring in order to promote effective planning and accountability.**

We are at your disposal to discuss these issues further.

Yours sincerely,



Nicolas Beger  
Director  
Amnesty International EU Office



Esteban Beltrán  
Director  
Amnesty International Spain

Cc: Andris Piebalgs, Commissioner designate for Development, European Commission  
Amos Tincani, Head of EU delegation in Burkina Faso