Resolution on maternal mortality ahead of the UN High-level event on the Millennium Development Goals to be held on 25 September 2008

2008/2621(RSP) - 04/09/2008 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

Following the debate which took place during the sitting of 3 September 2008, the European Parliament adopted by 394 votes to 182 with 34 abstentions, a resolution on Maternal Mortality ahead of the UN High-level Event on the Millennium Development Goals to be held on 25 September 2008.

The resolution had been tabled for consideration in plenary by the EPP-ED, PES, ALDE, GUE/NGL, and Greens/EFA groups.

Parliament expresses strong concern over the fact that maternal mortality (within MDG 5) is the only MDG on which not only has there been no progress since 2000, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, but 20 years ago the figures were the same as they are now. Over half a million women die in pregnancy or childbirth every year, and 99% of these deaths take place in developing countries. Women in sub-Sahran Africa run a lifetime risk of 1 in 16 of dying in pregnancy or in childbirth. Parliament calls on the Council and the Commission, ahead of the UN High Level Event on the MDGs, to prioritise action to meet MDG 5 targets.

The Council and Commission are asked to do the following :

- to reduce the disparity between maternal mortality rates in industrialised and developing countries;
- to intensify efforts to eliminate preventable maternal mortality and morbidity through development, implementation, and regular evaluation of 'road maps' and action plans for the reduction of the global burden of maternal mortality and morbidity;
- to expand the provision of maternal health services in the context of primary health care, based on the concept of informed choice, education on safe motherhood;
- to promote access for all women to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health information and services;
- to adopt the already well-established indicators and benchmarks for reducing maternal mortality (including Official Development Assistance (ODA) allocations) and to establish monitoring and accountability mechanisms that could lead to a constant improvement of the existing policies and programmes;
- to guarantee that reproductive health care services are affordable, available, accessible and of good quality, and to devote the maximum available resources to the policies and programmes on maternal mortality;
- to ensure the collection of reliable and timely data to guide the implementation of measures addressing maternal mortality and morbidity;
- to enable training, capacity-building, and infrastructure for an adequate number of skilled birth attendants, and to ensure that all pregnant women and girls have access to such attendants;
- to develop programmes and policies to address the underlying health determinants that are essential to prevent maternal mortality, such as participation in health-related decision-making processes, information on sexual and reproductive health, literacy, nutrition, non-discrimination, and the social norms underlying gender equality;

- to follow up the advances made in the reduction of maternal mortality, to participate actively in global forums such as 'Countdown to 2015', to share best practices on programmes and policies in this area, and to promote a continued momentum for improvement.

Parliament urges the EU to remain in the vanguard of efforts to support sexual and reproductive health rights by **maintaining levels of funding** for the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action. It regrets the fact that while sub-Saharan Africa has the highest rates of maternal mortality, it also has the lowest rate of contraceptive use in the world (19%), and 30% of all maternal deaths in the region are caused by unsafe abortions. Members believe that in order to meet the MDG targets on universal access to reproductive health by 2015, the level of funding from the EU has to be increased. Those Member States not on track to achieving ODA levels of 0.7 % of Gross National Income (GNI) by 2015 must increase their efforts.

Parliament calls on those countries which have not yet introduced a ban on harmful practices and traditions such as **female genital mutilation (FGM)** to take action and to support information campaigns to this end.

Lastly, the Parliament deplores the ban on the use of contraceptives advocated by churches, as condom use is crucial in preventing diseases and unwanted pregnancies. It condemns the US's 'global gag rule' which prevents foreign NGOs that receive USAID (United States Agency for International Development) family planning funding from using their own, non-US funds to provide legal abortion services, medical counselling or abortion referrals.