

*21 July 2010, Kampala* — Delegates to the 4th African Union pre-summit on Gender met on July 19 at Speke Resort Munyonyo in Kampala to discuss "Maternal, Infant and Child Health: African Youth Call for Action".

The three-day discussion ending July 21 sought solutions to the failure by African countries to attain targets set by Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to protect the lives and health of women and children. Improving maternal health and reducing child mortality are some of the eight MDGs adopted by the international community at the United Nations Millennium Summit in 2000.

According to a World Health Organisation (WHO) Maternal Mortality Report of 2005, every day 15,000 women die from pregnancy or child related complications in pregnancy, childbirth or the postpartum period. The major contributors to 80 percent of deaths are severe postpartum bleeding and infections, hypertensive disorders in pregnancy, and obstructed labour. Complications after unsafe abortion cause 13 percent of maternal deaths.

Among the indirect causes (20 percent) of maternal death are diseases that complicate pregnancy or are aggravated by pregnancy such as malaria, anemia, and HIV/AIDS. Women also die because of poor health at conception and a lack of adequate care needed for the healthy outcome of the pregnancy for themselves and their babies. Most of these deaths are avoidable.

The maternal mortality ratio in developing countries is 450 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births compared to nine in developed countries. Bience Philomina Gawanas, the Commissioner of Social Affairs on the African Commission, said it's a shame considering that 18 African countries will be celebrating 50 years of independence but they have not done enough to protect women and children's health.

"Losing a life of a woman or child is an indictment for Africa if most of these causes can be prevented," she said, "Our societies have not valued life, women have been put on the back banner and yet they are the givers of life. The African Union should not only be known for peacekeeping and observing elections, it should also value women and children's lives."

She said that resolutions and declarations will not solve Africa's problems. Policies already in place like the Maputo Plan of Action 2006/7, CARMMA (2009) are enough to drive the continent in achieving maternal and infant health development. "If we take charge, we can save a woman dying next door," she said.

Dr. Kassama Yankuba, the Director for African Union Medical Center, said governments need to commit at least 15 percent of their GDP to health.

Source: [allAfrica](#)