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Oral Statement

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More than 140 million women give birth globally each year with an additional estimated 35 million women also experiencing miscarriage and pregnancy loss. According to the World Health Organisation, every woman has the right to respectful dignified healthcare, including maternity care. Unfortunately, this is far from the reality for many women. Research shows that significant disparities exist in maternity care worldwide, and women often face neglect, abuse, and violence during childbirth, with women in regions affected by conflict, poverty, and poor health care infrastructure experiencing additional difficulties and hardships.

Despite international recognition of woman's right to dignified healthcare, serious issues persist and are well documented. Unacceptably high maternal mortality rates, obstetric violence, and a lack of equitable access to respectful, evidence-based care are reported globally.

Obstetric violence is recognised as a form of gender-based violence. In 2019, the UN special rapporteur on violence against women published a report detailing the widespread abuse and mistreatment women experience during childbirth care. These human rights violations lead to profound trauma. While the personal costs to women and their families are incalculable, several studies have estimated their economic costs, highlighting the broader impact on society.

Here is a vision for change: Maternity care must be woman-centred, consent-based, and evidence-based. Women must be actively involved in the design, planning and evaluation of their services.

Implementation of community-based midwifery-led care models should be implemented.

The need for systemic change is urgent. Women and society need a commitment from policymakers at the highest levels to establish a human rights-based legal framework, which enshrines the right to respectful care and ensure that all women, regardless of their location or circumstances, receive the quality care they are entitled to.