



European Economic and Social Committee

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PRESS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY: MOTHERS AS CHANGEMAKERS FOR SUSTAINABLE HEALTH
#MMM4Health**

Make Mothers Matter celebrated International Women's Day by organizing a conference on the challenges regarding mothers and health, on the 7th and 8th of March at the European Economic and Social Committee in Brussels. It was agreed by stakeholders that mothers have the power to be **agents of change** in their communities, to be transformers, not conformers. Innovative practices were presented showing that when mothers are informed, trained and supported they are part of the solution to promote sustainable health.

Dr. Marleen Temmerman, Chair of the Department of Obstetrics & Gynaecology at Aga Khan University in Nairobi and former WHO Director, highlighted the remaining challenges for maternal and child health in Africa. Despite progress being made towards the Millennium Development Goals, Kenya still has some of the highest maternal and child mortality rates globally, with 1 in 20 children dying before age 5. Therefore, it is imperative to strive towards reaching the Sustainable Development Goals for maternal mortality, seeking to reduce it to less than 70 deaths per 100,000 live births by 2030.

Other speakers, many of them members of Make Mothers Matter, discussed the necessity of access to quality, essential health-care services for all women. For instance, the MAMA initiative, the Mobile Alliance for Maternal Health, was presented, which delivers vital health messages to new and expectant mothers in developing countries via their mobile phones, using technology to advance maternal health.

However, too often, violence, infection, and stigma affect the health of women. Irene Nkosi, a mentoring mother from mothers2mothers in South Africa, inspired the conference with her story of going from victim to survivor. As a young woman, she experienced sexual violence, teenage pregnancy, HIV, and the loss of a child. But through mothers2mothers, she gained knowledge, closure, and now shares her knowledge with other mothers who are struggling with HIV.

Maternal health is not just an issue in the Global South. In 2013, there were 1,900 maternal deaths in Europe and 1 out of 10 women do not have access to prenatal care. In some countries, such as the US¹ maternal deaths are even increasing justifying the need to rethink maternal health as an equal right for everyone. It was agreed that developed and developing countries must work together to improve the health and opportunities for women and children.

¹ <http://www.economist.com/news/united-states/21657819-death-childbirth-unusually-common-america-exceptionally-deadly>



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In addition, Children's health was also discussed. Specifically, obesity during pregnancy is of great concern not only for mothers but also for their children. Mrs. Laurence Bosteels, President of Make Mothers Matter Belgium, presented the results of the European research project DORIAN on the lifelong negative consequences of obesity during pregnancy on children: increased chances of having diabetes, heart diseases etc .

UNICEF representative, Octavian Bivol presented a project sponsored in Senegal empowering mothers to become the link between the local health infrastructures and the rest of the community.

A successful initiative from the French NGO Vivons en Forme in tackling obesity with the support of the parents was discussed. In a city in the north of France, childhood overweight and obesity was reduced by 40% in 8 years and it is now implemented in more than 250 cities.

Make Mothers Matter President, Anne Claire de Liedekerke, said: *"Good practices presented during the conference are strong incentives for decision makers to consider mothers as active stakeholders to implement solutions in health related issues. That is what Make Mothers Matter has been asserting since it was created in 1947: mothers are changemakers and should be supported and included as key partners in development projects and goals."*

Make Mothers Matter is an international NGO created in 1947 to raise the awareness of policy makers and public opinion of the vital role of mothers for promoting peace and their contribution to social, cultural and economic development. MMM has no political or religious affiliations, and thus transparently represents the concerns of mothers at international level with permanent MMM representatives at the United Nations (General Consultative Status) and at the European Union.

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