Dear Colleagues,

On May 18, Aspen Global Health and Development (GHD)’s IDEA initiative, in partnership with the World Health Organization Reproductive Health Division (WHO) launched the Geneva Policy Dialogue Series on Reproductive Health, an annual series to be hosted at the World Health Assembly (WHA) each year from 2011-2014.

This inaugural event, which many of you attended or sent delegations on behalf of your countries, was entitled Delivering on the Promise of Universal Access to Reproductive Health: Countries Leading the Way in order to honor the leaders who have worked to accelerate progress towards universal access to reproductive health around the world. Thanks to participants like you, this inaugural event set the tone for a conversation that will continue over the next five years as we search for policy innovations that can move the needle on the ground and find the leaders who implemented them, honoring their achievements and learning from their successes.

As you know, this issue is urgent, and it is deep. Currently there are 215 million women in the world who want to delay or avoid their next pregnancy but do not have access to family planning. Women with unmet need account for 82% of the 75 million unintended pregnancies that occur in the developing world. We know that every year more than half a million women die unnecessarily during childbirth or from pregnancy complications. The lives of these women and of their children could be saved by access to comprehensive reproductive health care, empowering women and their partners to plan sustainable families that will strengthen their communities and support the economic growth and security of their countries.

By providing a forum for discussing and supporting progress on implementation of commitments such as the Maputo Plan of Action, the Ouagadougou Declaration, the U.N. Secretary-General’s Global Strategy for Women’s and Children’s Health and WHO Global Reproductive Health Strategy, this Dialogue Series will broaden the debate about the centrality of reproductive health within global development. As the inaugural event’s moderator, GHD Senior Strategic Advisor Dr. Lyndon Haviland, commented, ‘Talking about family planning and reproductive health is hard. It is both an intimate conversation and it must become a national and international priority.’ The series will also allow countries to share best practices and policy options and inspire leaders to serve as champions for reproductive health.

We hope you will pass on the successes of the inaugural Dialogue Series event by viewing the video of the speakers’ presentations, reading the event summary which touches on the best practices shared by this year’s speakers, and by working to support progress like we’ve seen in Ethiopia, Nepal, Rwanda, and Malawi. More information about Delivering on the Promise of Universal Access to Reproductive Health: Countries Leading the Way is available on our website at http://www.aspeninstitute.org/policy-work/global-health-development/What-We-Do/IDEA-Initiative/The-Geneva-Policy-Discussion-Series/delivering-promise.
Help us to continue this work, and this conversation, between now and the second event in the Geneva Policy Dialogue Series on Reproductive Health, which will take place in May 2012 at the time of the World Health Assembly. And as you do, consider what innovative policies might be good candidates for the Resolve Award. Announced by Vice Admiral Regina Benjamin on behalf of her fellow Global Leaders Council for Reproductive Health members, the award will honor innovative approaches by governments as they accelerate progress toward universal access to reproductive health through innovative policy development, financing or service provision methods. The award will be presented annually at the Geneva Policy Dialogue Series events to honor the innovations in reproductive health policies, financing or delivery that are truly making a difference.

We are proud to commend the progress made thus far and eager to encourage a renewed sense of urgency around the issue of universal access to reproductive health, both for its own sake and for its integral role in development overall. We urge continued commitment and cooperation to live up to the promises which have been made. Next year, we will meet again as a core group to reflect on the progress that has been made. Let us take this year together knowing that we can move from commitments to reality and deliver on the promise of universal access to reproductive health if countries lead the way.

Please contact GHD.info@aspeninst.org with any questions.

Yours sincerely,

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