

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

**REMARKS OF H.E. JAKAYA MRISHO KIKWETE, PRESIDENT
OF THE UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA, DURING
A SPECIAL EVENT ON COMMITMENT TO PROGRESS FOR
MOTHERS, NEWBORNS AND CHILDREN,
SEPTEMBER 25TH 2008**

*Friends,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

On behalf of the government of United Republic of Tanzania, I am very honoured to welcome you to this event. I am happy to see here a lot of advocates and leaders in the momentous efforts to achieve progress on survival and health for mothers, newborns and children. I thank you for good work you are doing in this effort. Your joint action so far is already helping to raise awareness on the problem and gaining support.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In too many parts of the world, women's ability to survive childbirth remains a matter of chance. The importance of our joint efforts to improve their survival and well being cannot be emphasized enough.

I have seen this first-hand in my country, where approximately 8,100 women die each year from complications during pregnancy and childbirth. I have witnessed first hand the troubles women go through to deliver child. One day in 2000, when I was a Member of Parliament, and was travelling in my constituency in Bagamoyo Tanzania, I met a group of people pushing a bicycle carrying a woman on the backseat. The woman had been in labour for many hours and was extremely weak and exhausted. Her family was trying to get her to the health centre, which was far from the village. Because I had a vehicle, I was able to assist them in getting to the hospital faster, and both the mother and baby survived.

Ever since that day, I have wondered what would have happened if I had not – simply by chance – been passing by that road at that particular moment. What about thousands of other pregnant women, who never got the chance to access the medical facilities? I have heard a lot of stories travelling around the country of pregnant women getting to the hospital with a baby's hand already sticking out for many hours.

Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen,

For too many of the world's women – and especially poor women – it is a matter of chance whether they can reach a health care facility during pregnancy and it is even more difficult at childbirth; whether skilled maternity care providers are there; and whether essential equipment and drugs are available. Surviving childbirth should not be a matter of chance. It is a matter of women's basic right to health and life. Women have a right to get through pregnancy and childbirth safely. Access and proximity to health centres to health centres with qualified and experienced midwives is a still a serious impediment to maternal health.

We have an obligation to ensure this right for all women. We must act to ensure that all women – rich or poor – can access essential services that have been proven to reduce maternal and neonatal mortality. These services include:-

1. Family planning and reproductive health;
2. Skilled maternity care throughout pregnancy and childbirth;

3. Emergency obstetric care when life-threatening complications develop; and,
4. Immediate postnatal care for both mothers and newborns.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

While there is agreement about what needs to be done to reduce maternal and neonatal mortality, the fact is that we are not on track to reach MDG 5 on improving maternal health. In some regions, such as sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, we have made little or no progress in increasing women's access to life-saving maternal health services. In many parts of the world, gaps between rich and poor women have been increasing – not decreasing.

This lack of progress is not because the task is too great or too challenging. It is because we have failed to make maternal health a priority. We, in this room, are in positions to change this, and indeed, we must do so. We have to scale-up budgetary allocations while mobilizing more resources. We must significantly increase the allocation of financial resources for maternal and newborn health. To meet the targets we have set, we need to increase funding for maternal and newborn health by

US \$5 billion annually by 2010 and by an additional US \$8 billion annually by 2015.

It is also important that we invest in increasing the number of skilled service providers – that is nurses, midwives, lab technicians and doctors. We need an additional 1 million skilled attendants by 2010 to ensure that lifesaving care is available to all women throughout pregnancy and childbirth.

We also need to make operational theatres medical equipments and supplies possible, for women in need of surgical interventions

Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Ensuring women's right to safe pregnancy and childbirth is an issue of social justice. And it is also an economic imperative. In terms of lost productivity, the costs of maternal ill health and related newborn mortality are estimated at US \$15 billion per year. This is a staggering amount. Yet, with an investment of an additional US \$ 5 billion per year, we could prevent most of these maternal and newborn deaths.

We who are here in this room today must work together and engage other partners in this effort to make pregnancy and childbirth safer. We can do it and we must do it.

I thank you for your kind attention!