



THE SECRETARY OF STATE
WASHINGTON

November 29, 2011

Dear Friends:

On behalf of the U.S. Department of State, it gives me great pleasure to extend my greetings to those gathered in Dakar for the International Family Planning Conference. While I regret I am unable to be with you in person today, I thank you for your leadership and hard work, and for your commitment to providing family planning and reproductive health care and services to the women and families who most need them. With 53 million unintended pregnancies in the developing world each year, and 215 million women facing unmet needs for family planning, this is the year we must commit ourselves to accelerating our efforts to ensure that all women have access to family planning and reproductive health care and services.

Family planning is the basic right of all individuals and couples to have the information and means to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing, and timing of their children, and my travels as Secretary of State have only reinforced my strong belief that continued U.S. commitment and involvement in this issue is of paramount importance.

I am proud to be a member of the global community of partners working to promote reproductive health and rights, united in our belief that voluntary family planning provides a solid foundation for all women to achieve their God-given potential. What is most impressive about this conference, and those of you in attendance, is the conviction we share to working with all our partners in the global community to achieve our common goals, for our community is much larger and more diverse than just state actors, it is all of us: NGOs, international organizations, civil society and private sector partners, and dedicated citizens. Those of you here today are on the front lines of this global effort, not only with your work, but through your efforts to change minds and attitudes, and the very circumstances that keep women and girls from reaching their full potential.

I have long believed that empowering women is the key to unlocking many of the challenges we face around the world. Our bottom line is and must remain the empowerment of women and young people to control their own sexual and reproductive choices. By improving access to reproductive health services, including family planning, we create a ripple effect that helps women care for their families, support their communities, and lead their countries to be healthier, and more productive.

The United States, through the Global Health Initiative and the good work of USAID, is committed to working with all of you to avert maternal death and disability, which is one of the greatest moral, human rights, and development challenges of our time, and is the world's largest health inequity. I pledge to continue to do all in my power to contribute to ending the needless death and suffering of women from complications of pregnancy and childbirth, and I ask each of you to join me in pledging to do the same.

Your continued support and commitment is essential to fighting for the lives of women and ensuring today's young girls and boys live in a tomorrow that holds out great promise. Together, through our work, we possess the power to help foster strong, healthy families, and thriving communities and countries.

Thank you for your dedication and hard work, and please know you have my very best wishes for a successful conference.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Hillary Rodham Clinton". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Hillary Rodham Clinton