



September 22, 2008

The Honorable George W. Bush  
President of the United States  
The White House  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Bush:

We appreciate the commitment shown by world leaders who signed the United Nations Millennium Declaration and pledged to spare no efforts to address global poverty, and your own public affirmation of U.S. commitment to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). As you know, without urgent and concerted action by all nations, the MDGs will not be achieved by 2015. We therefore urge you to assert bold and thoughtful leadership when nations convene at the U.N. headquarters on September 25 to chart a course to accelerate action on the MDGs.

Furthermore, we urge you to reaffirm the spirit of the Millennium Declaration, which placed human rights at the heart of efforts to tackle poverty, by taking a strongly human rights-centered approach to efforts to meet and surpass the MDGs. That requires:

1. **Strengthening national and international accountability for human rights.** Both donor and recipient states should ensure that efforts to achieve the MDGs fully take into account their human rights obligations. States should make public their plans and actions to achieve the MDGs and be subject to effective public accountability.
2. **Advancing equal access to human rights and ensuring non-discrimination.** Action under the MDGs should prioritize the poorest and most marginalized people. There should be a renewed focus on non-discrimination and advancing equality, including gender equality, to ensure that apparent progress on a given goal does not mask continuing or deepening inequality.
3. **Respecting the right to active participation of people in poverty.** Active participation of people living in poverty must be guaranteed in the planning and implementation of MDG efforts.

We urge you to exercise your leadership on keeping human rights at the heart of the MDGs. We also urge you to ensure that human rights remain at the core of any version of the MDGs after 2015.

In both the short- and long-term, MDG 5, to reduce maternal mortality by 75% by 2015, is of great importance. Saving the lives of mothers is crucial for achieving the other MDGs, including reducing infant and child mortality, educating children, and reducing poverty. But progress on maternal death has been unacceptably slow, with the global maternal mortality ratio dropping less than 1% per year between 1990 and 2005 – much below the 5.5% required to meet MDG 5.

A woman continues to die every minute in childbirth or due to pregnancy- or birth-related complications. The majority of these deaths are preventable. Meeting this crucial MDG requires renewed attention to both developing countries, where 99% of maternal deaths occur, and disparities within wealthier countries like the United States, where African-American women are three times more likely to die of pregnancy-related complications than white women.

Preventable maternal deaths can be averted and huge gains can be achieved in maternal health even in the poorest countries, provided there is sufficient political will matched by the necessary resources. One crucial step toward eliminating preventable maternal mortality is the provision of quality obstetric and emergency health care. Also essential is tackling the underlying causes of preventable maternal deaths, such as discrimination in access to health care and lack of comprehensive and sufficient information on sexual and reproductive health, including family planning information and services.

While we applaud the recent acknowledgement by the G8 nations of the obligation to assist poorer nations and increase health workers to strengthen health systems, specific targets remain necessary. Therefore, we join the White Ribbon Alliance and others in encouraging you to commit the United States to play its part to save women's lives by recognizing maternal health as a human right and announcing your plans to:

- Contribute to the additional US\$10 billion annual investment needed globally to ensure long-term, predictable financing for strengthened health systems for mothers, newborns and children;
- Invest 0.7% Gross National Income in foreign assistance by 2015;
- Collaborate on a global plan of action to increase the number of health workers by 4 million to meet the minimum goal of 2.3 doctors, nurses, and midwives per thousand to ensure adequate coverage by skilled birth attendants.

In addition, we urge you to announce your plans to:

- Ensure that reproductive health policies and programs – both at home and as part of international cooperation and assistance – respect, protect and fulfill women's human rights.

The upcoming U.N. high-level event represents an unmissable opportunity to both renew the central place of human rights in MDG efforts, and announce concrete targets to save mothers' lives. We thank you in advance for your leadership on both counts.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Larry Cox". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Larry" and last name "Cox" clearly distinguishable.

Larry Cox  
Executive Director  
Amnesty International USA

cc: Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, U.S. Department of State