

Commitment of Merck/MSD to increase access for all

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Thank you for the opportunity to share with you today Merck's renewed commitment to working together to secure Access for All. As the developer of some of the world's most important women's health products, Merck has long been committed to supporting activities around the world to ensure that women have access to products that protect and improve their health. As we all know only too well, women in low-income countries who want to protect themselves from unintended pregnancies do not have access to contraceptive methods. Due to various complexities and challenges that impede access to health care services, products such as long-acting reversible contraceptives that require limited user interaction are often important options for women's family planning choices.

Merck is an active member of the Coalition and fully supports the group's HANDtoHAND Campaign which pledges to have 100 million new users of modern contraception of their choice by 2015. Merck is partnering with Coalition members to help achieve the United Nations' Millennium Development Goal 5 of reducing maternal mortality. One of the ways we intend to support this goal is through the enhanced access and appropriate and effective use of Implanon.

I'm very happy to be here today in Ethiopia – the country where our long-acting reversible contraceptive method, Implanon, reaches the largest amount of women, contributing to their health and well-being of their families. We congratulate Dr. Kesete Berhan Admassu, State Minister for Health, and Ethiopia for its success in rapidly increasing the contraceptive prevalence rate and ensuring that even in the most remote parts of the country, women can access reproductive health services and technologies. Additionally, the Federal Ministry of Health of Ethiopia has demonstrated exemplary leadership in bringing together different organizations, many of whom are present here today, to achieve these strategic objectives.

Merck has products, knowledge, skills and global networks that we continue to make available for this important cause. The Federal Ministry of Health of Ethiopia can count on our continued commitment to further this program and to work together towards enhancement of quality service delivery.

For the last eight years, we have taken a similar approach to working in many other countries to contribute to high-quality access to long-acting reversible contraceptive methods down to the grass roots level. We are grateful to Ministers of Health in those countries and to the global donor and development community, many of whom are present here, for welcoming us to the table as a partner.

As a partner we are here today to announce further efforts to enhance our approach and meet the needs of women. To improve access, the global community needs to address a number of challenges and barriers – from affordability to financing to ensuring high-quality sustainable supplies. So I am pleased to announce today some of the ways in which we hope to meet those challenges.

Yesterday, Dr. Kesete made a request to make implants more affordable. Today, I am happy to announce that we are going to do just that.

With immediate effect, we will reduce the price of Implanon to least-resourced countries to the lowest possible level for us at this time. This price will enable all recipients of Implanon to reach more women who opt for this method and will contribute to the sustainability of public family planning programs. In addition, we are ready to partner with new ministries of health and donors to enhance access and informed use of Implanon at grassroots levels, enabling further price reductions. Moreover in the mid-to long-term period, Merck is committed to assessing quality manufacturing opportunities that would further bring down the price.

In addition to reduction in price, we're further enhancing access by partnering with the UN Foundation and the Pledge Guarantee for Health to implement a finance mechanism to help donors' funds go further. Additionally, to ensure timely access, we propose to work with the AccessRH to guarantee that adequate stocks of Implanon are available to recipients for prompt shipment to least-resourced countries where Implanon is marketed.

These proposals are the result of a transparent and open exchange made possible by the Reproductive Health Supplies Coalition. We thank the Coalition for initiating and enabling the open discussions between Merck and the family planning community and the Coalition's support that has brought us to where we are here today. We are grateful to the Coalition for continuing to offer the supplies community a neutral platform for discussion on joint access and issues and global demand planning. We look forward to partnering with you all to achieve access for all.

Thank you for your attention.