

THE COALITION SINCE WASHINGTON

Presentation to the Ninth Membership Meeting of the
Reproductive Health Supplies Coalition, Brussels, Belgium
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It gives me tremendous pleasure and indeed pride to welcome you here this morning to the launch of the Ninth Membership Meeting of the Reproductive Health Supplies Coalition. And it gives me special pleasure to welcome you here to Brussels - our home, the capital of Belgium and the heart of Europe.

For many of you, this meeting will be your first face-to-face encounter with Coalition colleagues; and in some cases your first exposure to the results of our work. So it is fitting that I begin this morning's discussions by briefing you on the state of the Coalition, highlighting in particular the events and accomplishments that have taken place since we last met, seven months ago in Washington, DC. I also wish to use this opportunity to provide you with a sense of the direction in which we intend to be moving in the coming months. And *finally*, I would like to review with you the *agenda* of the current meeting – and what we hope to accomplish by the end of the next two days.

In describing the State of the Coalition, I would like to follow the precedent I set last October by framing my discussion around our Strategic Plan. For those of you new to the Coalition, our Plan represents the outcome of an exhaustive nine-month period of intense consultation and review. It is a comprehensive, some might say overly ambitious document. But it encapsulates in its three broad goals, the

critical elements we believe underlie the achievement of supply security. These are an adequate and diverse financing for supplies; strong harmonized supply systems; and a sustained global partnership to ensure effective knowledge-sharing and coordinated action. The Coalition is not, as you all know, an *implementing* agency. We act through the actions of our members. But we do bring to the work of our members an added value – one that derives from shared knowledge – what we sometimes call the “brain trust”; and from our ability to convene key players in the supplies arena, create awareness, and forge consensus.

As a catalyst for change, it is sometimes easy to confuse accomplishments with process. We convene meetings, we encourage the development of new tools; we issue joint declarations. But at the end of the day, the question we all want answered is “are we making a difference?” Is all this matchmaking really producing fruitful unions?

Over the past year, the Coalition Secretariat and Executive Committee have worked strategically to heighten awareness of the supply challenge and to advocate for increased financing for supplies. We have addressed fora targeting key supply stakeholders including the regional and national governments of Cataluña, Denmark, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Norway, and the United Kingdom.

Direct attribution is always a risky endeavor, but there is no doubt in my mind that our efforts during the past year have played no small part in expanding the resource base for RH supplies and, most notably, in contributing towards UNFPA’s largest-ever annual increase in donor funding. In addition to the Catalan Government, which made its first

contribution ever in 2007, four of UNFPA's top ten donors were at the receiving end of Coalition advocacy efforts. These include the Spanish government, which became the first bilateral to join the Coalition under our new membership policy; Germany, whose contribution to the Global Programme was *explicitly* linked to the Coalition's list of "focus countries"; and the British Government, which provided £100 million on the heels of a 2007 evaluation that explicitly emphasized the need for closer collaboration between UNFPA and the Coalition.

But the connection between the advent of new resources and the Coalition is even more direct when we look at the financial support channeled directly towards Coalition-sponsored initiatives. This year, Coalition members contributed over US\$1.3 million towards the development of new tools and research, and the operation of key Secretariat functions. This amount – which effectively matches the annual contribution by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to the operations of the Secretariat – reflects the generosity of our many bilateral and non-governmental partners *as well as*, for the first time, our new colleagues in industry and the commercial sector.

As remarkable as our efforts have been to expand the resource base for supplies, the past six months have also seen notable success in addressing the Coalition's second strategic goal, which is to strengthen supply chain systems. This year, for example, the Secretariat took over the management and coordination of the Countries at Risk (CAR) group, a move that has resulted in more regular meetings, better and more reliable supply data, and quicker follow-on decisions. This year, a reenergized CAR addressed stock-out threats in Bangladesh, Kenya, and Mozambique; overstocks in Ethiopia; and shortages in Ghana and

Zimbabwe. It is, quite frankly, an excellent example of the benefits of collaboration and coordination brought by the Coalition.

Last October in Washington, I announced member contributions of more than half a million dollars towards the design and pilot-testing of a global financing and procurement mechanism, otherwise known as the Pledge and Minimum Volume Guarantees. Today, barely seven months on, we already have the preliminary results of that exercise. Thanks to the World Bank, which has so efficiently managed the transition from general concept to design reality; thanks to the vision and creativity of Dalberg Consulting, the firm chosen to undertake this exercise; and thanks to the technical and financial support of so many Coalition members, we now have the outlines of **two** new mechanisms that could fundamentally change the ways agencies pool procurement and address the nonalignment of funding and procurement cycles.

In the coming two days, we will hear of other Coalition successes at strengthening global supply systems. The RHIInterchange (RHI), which remains the only comprehensive source of up-to-date information on global supply procurements, has just expanded its data base to include procurement from at least 12 additional funding sources. With this expansion, the RHI now accounts for over a billion dollars of RH supply procurements in over 140 countries worldwide. We will also hear the results of a recently completed technical review that seeks to harmonize the many software tools currently in place to enhance supply chain management. Once again, six months ago, the review was only an idea on paper. Tomorrow, we will hear the results.

The Coalition's third strategic goal is to support the global architecture needed to address what we call the "supplies challenge". That means forging partnerships and building commitment, but it also means ensuring that the Coalition's role within that global architecture remains relevant and sustainable. This year's impressive *financial* commitments were more than matched by the dramatic *institutional* buy-in of the RH community as a whole. In the seven months since the decision was taken to open up Coalition membership to the broader RH community, our numbers have grown to well over 66 institutions. We include among our ranks for the first time, 38 NGOs, 8 manufacturers and representatives of the commercial sector, 2 private foundations, two new multilateral agencies and two new bilaterals: the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Spain and France. It is a testament to the commitment and support of these new members that over seventy percent have chosen, at their own cost, to join us here today.

Forging and sustaining new partnerships is, at the end of the day, all about communication. And on that front we too have made great strides. The webpage mock-ups I unveiled last October are today alive and well on the new Coalition website. It is a website of which we can all be extremely proud. It emphasizes the Coalition's added-value and allows readers to grasp and understand our work. It reflects our desire to make supply security "more real" to a broader audience, and has quick links that can lead readers to the RHI, the CAR group, and very soon, a host of new Coalition-sponsored tools, such as the Advocacy Toolkit and a new global data-base or "One-Stop Shop" of country-specific reference materials.

But let us not forget that sustainable partnerships are also about sustaining the institutional frameworks through which we meet our common goals – and that, we all know, takes money. Last month, I forwarded to the Executive Committee, the results of a six month consultancy designed to explore options for assuring the financial sustainability of the Coalition.

The consultancy report and discussions that followed have provided us all with a host of new insights and perspectives. But they have also highlighted some fundamental truths – and one such truth is the need to demonstrate that we are, in fact, making a difference. Earlier this year, the Secretariat submitted for review a draft M&E Plan. The Plan comprises a total of 59 indicators that will be monitored across our 14 focus countries.

In many ways, the Coalition has come of age. Collectively, we have brought to a close one chapter of forging new systems and policies—and embarked on another, where the impact of those systems is already beginning to emerge and take shape. Our expanding membership, the formulation of a new Strategic Plan, the search for financial sustainability— all of these represent enormous windows of opportunity. But they also represent significant departures from the past, and therefore will require of us new ways of seeking out available resources, new ways of managing a more diverse membership, and new ways of ensuring that our work remains relevant and meaningful. Maximizing these opportunities to achieve our goals demands that we focus our energies in the coming year in addressing four key challenges, all of which are reflected in the draft workplan that I submitted yesterday to the Executive Committee.

The first challenge is to fully operationalize our Strategic Plan – to ensure that it is a living document, understood by all, and able to inform the workplans of the Secretariat, the Working Groups, and Coalition a whole. In 2008, the Secretariat will reinforce efforts to operationalize the Strategic Plan through more focused communications, intensive interaction with the Working Groups, and through informal efforts to reinforce linkages between the Plan and the work we do.

Our second challenge derives from what I see as one of our greatest strengths – a new and expanded membership. As I noted earlier, expansion of the Coalition’s membership has provided us with an extraordinary opportunity to advance our strategic goals, to broaden our horizons, and to begin addressing new priorities and issues. But it is also an opportunity that places upon us demands that we have thus far not faced. For me, a great part of the Coalition’s success can be attributed to its legacy of very personalized, face-to-face working relationships – be they within Working Groups, among the Executive Committee, or simply at general membership meetings. As we grow in size, we will need to re-assess the ways we communicate and work together – capitalizing on the best of the past, but at the same time, not getting stuck in it.

This meeting represents an important first step in that process. In the WG breakout sessions, you will be asked to explore new ways of structuring and managing work so as to reflect the new realities of an expanding membership. We too have begun exploring new approaches to bridge the distances that separate us. In our draft workplan, we have proposed the introduction of a host of innovative communication

tools. We also look at opportunities to maximize our outreach through member agencies in country. And we are looking to broaden our linguistic diversity by creating tools that reach out to non English-speaking audiences.

The third major issue driving our agenda in the coming year will be to engage more actively our developing country partners. Of the 55 members who have joined the Coalition since October, only about 20 percent are from LMI countries. And of those, none represent developing country governments. Having spent so much of my own professional career in the developing world, I know how critically important it is that the resources and technical support we provide reflect the needs and priorities of those at country-level. For that reason, we have set forth in our workplan a series of activities that I hope will encourage greater developing country input – and particularly from our focus 14 countries. We will soon have on our Executive Board a representative of a developing regional organization. We also intend to be more active in visiting countries to establish and cement relationships, and to familiarize others with the Coalition's work. And finally, we have set for ourselves the target of securing membership in the Coalition by focus-country governments.

Our fourth priority for the coming year will be to ensure the Coalition's financial sustainability. Although the Secretariat's current funding cycle takes us through September of 2009, the reality is that for many donors, especially bilateral donors, now is the time to program funds for 2009 and beyond. We see the coming year, therefore, as a period of serious stock-taking and financial review. We also see it as a period of pursuing

new financing opportunities; of preparing grant proposals, ... and, yes, of keeping our fingers crossed.

Coming to terms with these new realities – the new strategic plan, a broader membership, greater country input, and financial sustainability - will rest at the heart of our work in the coming six to nine months.

Today's meeting, as I noted earlier, represents a key "first step" in that process.

As you review the agenda, you will see that it is divided into four major parts, each with a very specific thematic focus in mind – each very much linked to the topics and issues I have discussed.

This morning, we showcase the work of our host, the European Commission. For many – Europeans and non-Europeans alike, the Commission remains a mystery. For some it represents an untapped, enlightened pot of gold; for others it evokes images of a mysterious, unmanageable labyrinth. The aim of this morning's session, therefore, is to make some sense of this uncertainty. It is to sketch out the key landmarks in a complex European road map, but also to make clear the potential role of those landmarks in realizing the Coalition's three strategic goals. During this session we will hear from a number of Coalition partners whose knowledge of the European- and Brussels-scene is without parallel.

We are also fortunate to witness, for the first time in any public forum, an unveiling of the new RH Strategy of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Many of us here today are, in fact, *here today* precisely

because of the Foundation's commitment to RH and RH supplies – so we are indeed privileged to be present at this unveiling.

This afternoon, we return to an issue I have discussed throughout this presentation – namely, the new opportunities to be derived from our expanded membership. One of our responsibilities as a Secretariat is to ensure that new ideas inform and enrich the Coalition's work. More concretely, it means engaging new members with our current Working Groups, assisting, if necessary, in the formation of new Working Groups; or simply facilitating greater dialog among all partners

As the recipient of all new membership requests, we have been at the receiving end of many new ideas and approaches that, to be honest, have not so far been part of our regular discourse. Our session this afternoon, therefore, is designed to share some of those ideas with you, give credit to their authors, and begin the process of allowing these new inputs to work their way into the existing structures of the Coalition. The breakout sessions that follow are designed to facilitate Working Group introductions; enable you to identify areas of common interest; and begin making decisions about the ways you want to move forward, remain engaged, and manage your work.

Tomorrow morning, the Working Groups once again take center stage, presenting in plenary their accomplishments and activities since our last meeting in Washington. This is an opportunity for us all to hear what many of you have been discussing internally within your own separate meetings over the past few days. We are also fortunate to have with us a colleague from the Dalberg Group who will be reporting on their

progress in developing the proof of concept for the Minimum Volume and Pledge Guarantees.

We end our meeting tomorrow, on the issue of sustainability - sharing with you in more detail our vision for moving forward; but also encouraging you, within your Working Groups to begin thinking about the sustainability of your own work. Where do funding gaps exist? What activities would you undertake if funding were available? And how could your institutions enhance the sustainability of the workstreams in which you are involved?

There is no question that we in the Coalition have come a long, long way from our first meeting, tucked away in a small corner office at the World Bank. Who would have imagined that in less than four years, we would fill an auditorium of this size, and that we would do so with as wide a diversity of members as we have here today? This, to me, this is a powerfully reassuring signal that the days are numbered when women or men should suffer or die because the supplies they need to prevent an unwanted pregnancy, or ensure a safe delivery, or treat an infection are simply not there.

On that note, and on behalf of the Executive Committee and the Secretariat, I wish you the best of success for a productive and exciting two days.