

The Road to *Women Deliver*

1948: United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights spelled out for the first time a global agreement that every woman, man and child had certain rights merely because they were human beings. No exceptions for “cultural practices,” “national traditions,” “family matters” or “religious teachings.” No exceptions for gender, skin color, ethnicity, political views, religion or nation. No exceptions.

1968: International Conference on Human Rights, Teheran, affirmed that couples “have a basic human right to determine freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children.”

1975: First UN World Conference on Women, Mexico City, set three goals: full gender equality and elimination of gender discrimination; integration and full participation of women in development; and increased contribution by women to strengthening world peace. Delegates called for an international covenant to protect women’s rights.

1976-1985: United Nations International Decade for Women (IDW), a product of the 1975 conference, led to establishment of UNIFEM, the UN Development Fund for Women. Two-thirds of UN member states adopted some form of national “plan” for women.

1979: CEDAW, the Treaty for the Rights of Women, approved at the UN. The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is the most comprehensive international agreement on women’s basic rights. Ratified by more than 180 countries (but not the United States), it has become an important tool for ending human-rights abuses and promoting the well-being of women and girls worldwide.

1980: Second World Conference on Women, Copenhagen, identified three priorities: equal access to education, employment opportunities and adequate health care.

1985: Third World Conference on Women, Nairobi, recognized that relatively few women had benefited from progress so far and that the need for gender equality pertained to all areas of human activity. It set categories for assessing progress: in constitutional and legal measures, social participation, and political participation and decision-making.

1987: Safe Motherhood Conference, Nairobi. The enormous toll of women dying in pregnancy and childbirth worldwide led WHO, the World Bank and UNFPA (the United Nations Population Fund) to spearhead the research and advocacy Safe Mother Initiative to promote investment in measures to save women’s lives. In its 20-year history, the SMI has made reduction of maternal mortality an essential health goal for the global community.

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Invest in women – it pays



1992: UN Conference on Environment and Development (“Earth Summit”), Rio de Janeiro, recognized the vital role of women in sustainable and social development and affirmed the rights of adolescents.

1993: UN International Conference on Human Rights, Vienna, declared that women’s rights are human rights, condemned violence against women as human rights abuse, and led to the naming of a UN Special Rapporteur on women’s situation worldwide.

1994: International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), Cairo, said meeting reproductive health and other needs of individual women and men was the best path to development and slowing population growth. Leaders of 179 countries reached consensus on a 20-year Programme of Action – the “Cairo Consensus” – that called for investments in women of \$21.7 billion per year by 2015.

1995: United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, spelled out in its Platform for Action 12 critical areas of concern for achieving equality, development and peace. It set targets and explained measures that governments, donors, multilateral agencies and non-governmental organizations should take to meet the goals.

2000: Millennium Declaration and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), New York. At a global summit meeting, world leaders agreed on eight broad development goals for achievement by 2015, along with related targets and indicators for progress. The goals are: 1) Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; 2) Achieve universal primary education; 3) Promote gender equality and empower women; 4) Reduce child mortality; 5) Improve maternal health; 6) Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; 7) Ensure environmental sustainability; and 8) Develop a global partnership for development. In 2006, the UN General Assembly agreed to add universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights to the list as a target under MDG #5.

2002: World Children’s Summit, New York, called for essential and emergency obstetric care before, during and after pregnancy and delivery as the best way to save the lives of women and children worldwide.

2002: World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, focused on economic and financial approaches to development rather than on women’s role or rights-based policies.

2004: Global Roundtable Countdown 2015, London, assessed progress on sexual and reproductive health and rights in the decade since the Cairo Consensus of the ICPD. More than 700 activists, parliamentarians and world leaders expressed disappointment at the pace of investment and policy change but committed themselves to renewed action on behalf of girls and women worldwide – especially in integrating reproductive health with HIV/AIDS initiatives and in bringing young people into policy-making councils.

2005: Commission on the Status of Women 10-Year Review and Appraisal, New York, found that the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action had sparked major improvements for women in some places although reaction had worsened conditions in others. Promises were not being kept.