

Global Safe Abortion Conference

October 23-24, 2007

Opening Plenary

**Remarks of Elizabeth S. Maguire
President and CEO, Ipas**

Good morning.

I would like to join Dana in welcoming all of you to this historic global conference on safe abortion.

This conference must mark a turning point for women's reproductive choices.

Many of you attended the ICPD in 1994 when governments for the first time acknowledged the major public health problem of unsafe abortion ... and ICPD+5 in 1999 when they called on health systems to provide safe and accessible abortion care to the full extent of the law. It is an outrage that in the years since those landmark events, close to 1 million women have died from complications of botched abortions! And over 50 million women have suffered needlessly from the injuries and disabilities caused by abortion complications.

And yet, abortion is one of the safest of all medical procedures when performed by a skilled provider in a hygienic setting.

Like Marie Stopes International, Ipas is working with partners in every region to stop this preventable tragedy and to expand access to safe, comprehensive abortion care, including contraception.

For Ipas, this effort begins with supporting champions of women's reproductive health and rights. We salute all the great champions attending this conference.

Over the next two days, together we must create the foundation for a new global movement to turn women's right to safe abortion into reality.

When we share our Call to Action around the world, we must say to everyone:

- We will not stand for playing politics with women's lives.
- We will not allow powerful institutions to continue holding women and their defenders hostage on the issue of abortion.

- We will not tolerate threatening political leaders with:
 - electoral defeats,
 - private companies with boycotts, and
 - individuals with excommunication from the religious communities they hold dear.
- We will not stop until the basic technologies for safe abortion care and contraception, that have been available in rich countries for decades, reach every village in low-income countries around the world.
- We will not be satisfied until all women know their legal rights and reproductive options.
- We will not be silent until criminal penalties are removed for women who seek and health professionals who provide abortions.
- We will not rest until governments and donors put women's lives first in their priorities for money and attention.

Most important, we will engage women everywhere to demand the sexual and reproductive health care they need and the compassionate treatment and respect they deserve.

We will call on women everywhere to demand ready access to safe and affordable contraception and abortion so that all women can prevent and manage unwanted pregnancies.

With leaders here from every region, now is the time to begin a new era in advancing the human dignity and rights of women around the world.

Now is the time for all of us to speak out loudly and take bold action! We must join together to:

- Stop the deaths and injuries from unsafe abortion.
- End the silence and hypocrisy.
- Erase the stigma.
- And fight for social justice and the health, well-being and equality for all women