

**Minister Dirk Niebel, Member of the German Parliament
Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development**

**Address at the opening of the
Health and Human Rights Exhibition**

“Health – It’s My Right!”

**at the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
in Berlin on 5 October 2010**

Executive Director Thoraya Obaid,
Director General Gill Greer,
Your Excellencies,
My fellow Members of the German Bundestag,
Fellow participants of the 8th International Dialogue on Population and Sustainable
Development,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you to my Ministry this evening.

I am honoured to be opening this exhibition with you – an exhibition that links two priority areas of our development policy with each other, namely health as a basic prerequisite for development and human rights as a precondition for a life lived in self-determination and dignity.

On this subject, Kofi **Annan**, the former Secretary General of the United Nations, once said:

“It is my aspiration that **health** will finally be seen not as a blessing to be wished for, but **as a human right** to be fought for.”

I share this aspiration.

We must not accept the deaths of infants who die shortly after being born, or of mothers who do not survive pregnancy, as tragic strokes of fate.

Such incidents violate the basic human rights to life and to physical and mental health.

These are human rights that have been recognised for decades now by the majority of states.

We must ensure that states discharge their duty, but we must also **join together** to provide support wherever they reach the limits of what they can do on their own.

When I call for us to “join together”, I am referring not only to partner governments and donor countries, as they are called, but also expressly as well to **civil society and private sector players**.

Our dialogue event today is sending out the right signal: Government, the private sector and representatives of civil society organisations, both national and international, have come together in order to jointly discuss **the topic of the future, “population”**.

I should like to express my thanks to all the organisers and sponsors – in particular our international partner, the **International Planned Parenthood Federation** – for making this event possible.

Only if we work together will we be able to create the opportunities for personal initiative that are needed to “**help people to help themselves**”.

And only if we work together will we be able to fight poverty on a sustainable basis and achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

I therefore thank you all for coming to Berlin.

For two days, you will be working very specifically on the following **practical issues** and challenges:

Which strategies to secure the right to health have proved effective?

What difficulties are there, and how can we overcome them?

That is why we look to you to provide important inspiration for our further work together. Be creative, be daring and come up with solutions!

As I said at the beginning:

Health and human rights are priority areas of German development policy.

How have our actions shown this?

Earlier this year, the BMZ started a “human rights offensive”.

A few weeks ago at the G8 summit in Canada and the MDG summit in New York, Germany’s Chancellor Angela Merkel announced that we would provide another 400 million euros for the period up to 2015 to help improve mother and child health.

We will use these funds in particular for projects in **reproductive health and family planning**.

These are matters that are not only vital for the health of millions of people but also have an impact on conditions for development in general. Again, they are also a core human rights issue.

A woman who in the past ten years has with great energy applied herself to keeping this human rights issue on the international agenda is **Thoraya Obaid**.

Ms. Obaid, in a few weeks time, you will be handing on the baton after ten years at the helm of the UNFPA as its Executive Director.

You breathed life into the action plan agreed at the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo – where your commitment to this important cause encouraged us all.

Ms. Obaid you have always supported these International Dialogues here in Berlin.

Therefore I would like to express my particular thanks to you, not only for your invaluable international work but also for your support here in Berlin.

Ladies and gentlemen, not everything can be expressed in words – or as the American painter **Edward Hopper** once aptly put it: “If I could say it in words, there would be no reason to paint.”

That is why we have decided to put on the exhibition “Health – it’s my right!” here at the BMZ, to coincide with the 8th International Dialogue.

The exhibition brings together for the first time projects carried out in **Bangladesh, Kenya and Malawi** – three partner countries, in which Germany supports health measures as a priority.

A number of **young artists** from these three countries have expressed their ideas about health and human rights in their artworks.

The artist Nahid Rokhsana from Bangladesh is our guest here today and is going to tell us about her work herself, which for now is still hidden under this cloth.

With a nod to Edward Hopper, I should like to finish now and leave the floor to Ms. Obaid and then Ms. Rokhsana.

Afterwards, we would like to invite you to a reception we have prepared so that we can all relax following what, for many, has been a very long working day.

I now declare this exhibition open!

