

**CLOSING STATEMENT DELIVERED BY HON. NANA OYE LITHUR,
MINISTER OF GENDER, CHILDREN AND SOCIAL PROTECTION AT THE 7TH
AFRICA CONFERENCE ON SEXUAL HEALTH AND RIGHTS IN ACCRA**

12TH FEBRUARY, 2016

H. E DR/MRS LORDINA MAHAMA, 1ST LADY OF GHANA

H.E MARGARET KENYATA, 1ST LADY OF KENYA

H.E SIA KOROMA, 1ST LADY, SIERRA LEONE

MRS. JAN BEAGLE, UNAIDS DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

DR. U. U. ESHIET, CONFERENCE CONVENOR

MR. KINGSLEY OBENG-KYERE EX. COORDINATOR, CURIOUS MINDS

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THE MEDIA

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

I want to thank you for inviting me to speak at this very important conference. For the past three days, this conference has been discussing the Critical Importance of Adolescents and Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights and the Demographic Dividend that could be realised.

We as Government of Ghana have taken notice of the discussions you have had at this conference. Even after this conference, we shall continue the discussions at all levels to ensure that sexual health and rights are preserved for sustainable development.

Ladies and gentlemen, the objectives of the 7th Africa Conference on Health and Rights included:

- Identifying best practices for adolescents and youth sexual and reproductive health with a focus on effective responses to youth vulnerabilities
- Facilitating knowledge management and programming to enhance adolescents and youth agency.
- Enhancing adolescent and youth policies and programmes in regional and global development agenda.

These are laudable objectives and I am sure that you are all going to your respective countries with a renewed impetus to contribute constructively to development.

Ladies and gentlemen, there is the need for African countries to put in place effective public policies which can take advantage of the demographic dividend. These policies must promote investments which will help the young people to be more productive during their working years. Failure to provide opportunities to the young population will result in rising unemployment and an increased risk of social upheaval.

These policies must address issues of education and health; nutrition and infrastructural development which address productive investment and inclusion of the youth. Promoting a healthy sexuality, marriage and childbearing among younger people is the sure way of ensuring the reduction of the proportion of non-productive dependents. The Government

of Ghana is addressing adolescent sexual and reproductive health rights because it knows they are critical for overall national development. They have thus become a priority for the Ghana Government.

What this Government has done therefore is to use policy and social protection programming to address sexual health and rights, thereby reducing poverty to achieve the SDGs. The National Adolescent Reproductive Health Policy (2000) provides a context for addressing teenage pregnancies, adolescent sexuality, early marriage and infant mortality, maternal mortality, fertility rates, family planning and sex education. The National Gender policy also aims at mainstreaming gender, women's empowerment and social protection concerns into national development processes for equitable livelihood for women and men, boys and girls. What Ghana is doing is to empower the vulnerable populations so we can realise the demographic dividend of an economically viable population.

To improve sexual rights among women and address stunting in children, we have introduced LEAP 1000 a cash transfer programme in the Upper East and Northern Regions. More than 6000 pregnant women or families with children below two years living in poverty are being supported with

cash grants. At the core of this intervention is the concern for the health of the mother and the child.

We have realized that too many of our young people face barriers to reproductive health information and care. It is to remove such barriers that on Wednesday, the President together with the First Lady launched the national campaign to end child marriage. The purpose of the campaign is to coordinate efforts by various stakeholders towards ending child marriage in Ghana; increase social action, acceptance and visibility and supporting through active community engagements and dialogue with stakeholders.

With the support of the UNFPA, we have set up Gender Based Violence response centres at Mallam Atta and Agbogbloshie markets. These centres are providing health, social and legal services to victims of abuse in the markets. Our Government, led by H.E President John Dramani Mahama is determined to ensure that the campaign to promote the rights of the vulnerable in Ghana succeeds.

To address the high rates of teenage pregnancy in Ghana, The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection convened a nationwide stakeholders meeting last year to assess the current level of teenage pregnancy, and to strategize for sustained national sensitization. In

addition, the Ministry compiled a Mapping Report on Teenage Pregnancy in Ghana focusing on the key strategies in addressing teenage pregnancy.

I would like to urge you, as youth of Africa to be diligent as you go back to your respective countries. You hold the key to the future of this continent. Leaders of this continent are more than poised to set the stage for you to bring about real change.

Thank you.