A message to the lady of Laetoli
Closing speech
Global Maternal Health Conference
Arusha, Tanzania,
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Your Excellency Mama Salma Kikwete, First Lady, United Republic of Tanzania
Your Excellency Honourable Juma Duni Haji, Minister of Health, Zanzibar
Conference Co-chairs: Dr. Guerino Chalamilla, and Dr. Ana Langer
Dear participants

As our great conference comes to a close, and while we are still in this beloved country, dubbed the “Cradle of Mankind”, I want on behalf of all of us to send a message, a message from the heart, to the lady of Laetoli.

Laetoli is not too far from this beautiful city Arusha. It is recognized by UNESCU as a part of world heritage sites.
The lady is quite old. Scientists say she must be 3.6 million years old. She left us her footprints, carrying an infant on her hip, as she walked through wet volcanic ash, to be discovered only in 1976 by a team led by Mary Leakey.
A cast of these footprints is on display in the hall of human origins in the Smithsonian museum in Washington D.C., as the earliest, yes the earliest, known human footprints in the world. The lady of Laetoli left us more than her footprints. We still carry her mitochondrial DNA in our genome. She is a most ancient mother of mothers we can identify with. Her descendants, at a certain point in time past, ventured on the most incredible human journey to populate our globe. The lady of Laetoli reminds us of our common motherhood, the tie that binds us all as humans.
A message to the lady of Laetoli

- We thank and we appreciate
- We regret and we apologize
- We promise and yes, we can

From this great conference, let us send a message from the heart to our mother of mothers, and through her to all mothers past and present. The message is in three parts: First, we thank and we appreciate; second we regret and we apologize and third we promise and yes we can.

First, let us convey to the old lady and her women descendants our great appreciation and humble gratitude. It was only because of the major sacrifices they made, and the risks they have taken, that we are here in the world today.

With the extremely high human mortality, particularly infant and child mortality, throughout human history until recently, survival of our species was the gift and the sacrifice of women.
A dangerous journey

In a piece of our African folklore, a mother tells her children: “I am going to the sea to fetch a new baby; the journey is dangerous and I may not return”.

In a piece of our African folklore, a mother tells her children: “I am going to the sea to fetch a new baby; the journey is dangerous and I may not return”. And she is right. Many did not return, and many still do not return even today.

“Natural” maternal mortality

Where nothing is done to avert maternal death, “natural” mortality is around 1000-1500 per 100 000 live births.

A report from the World Health Organization estimated that if nothing is done to avert maternal death, so-called “natural maternal mortality” will be around 1000 to 1500 per 100,000 live births.

Before coming to this great country, the cradle of mankind, I tried to look up some demographic estimates of the number of humans ever been born to our mothers. One estimate, or guesstimate, given by the Population Reference Bureau, in a publication last year, was Between 107 and 108 billion.
Women martyrs in the battle for human survival

Number humans ever been born
107,602,707,791

Where nothing is done to avert maternal death, “natural” mortality is around
1000-1500 per 100 000 live births.

It is mind boggling to think of the numbers of young noble women who gave up their life to fulfill the divine obligation to be fruitful, multiply and replenish the earth.

“and God blessed them and God said unto them, Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth”

Holy Bible: Genesis 1:28
Women and the battle for human survival

The numbers of young noble women, who gave up their lives in the battle for survival of our species, are certainly much more than the numbers of men who gave up their lives in battles for mutual human destruction.

The numbers of the young noble women who gave up their lives in the battle for our survival are certainly much more than the numbers of men who lost their lives in battles for mutual human destruction.
A message to the lady of Laetoli

- We thank and we appreciate
- **We regret and we apologize**
- We promise and yes, we can

We regret and we apologize.

We plead guilty

**Women in the twenty/ twenty-first century do not have to give up their lives when they give us a new life.**

We owe women of the world an apology. We express our regret and we confess our guilt, although we cannot dare to ask for or expect forgiveness. Mothers sacrificed their lives when we had no means to save their lives. But after the world had the knowledge and
means to make motherhood safer for women, mothers in many parts of the world were left to die. The world turned a deaf ear to their screams.

Things are now better. But even today, 800 young women in the prime of their lives give up their lives every day to give us a new life. The tragedy is that almost all these deaths need not to happen.
We regret and apologize

Even today, every two minutes, a young woman in the prime of her life somewhere in our one world gives up her life to give us a new life.

The inconvenient truth

Mothers are not dying because of diseases we cannot treat. They are dying because societies have yet to make the decision that their lives are worth saving.

The inconvenient truth is that these mothers are not dying because of conditions we cannot prevent or treat. To put it bluntly, they are dying because societies had yet to make the decision that their lives are worth the cost of saving.
The inconvenient truth

The inconvenient truth, and let us face it, is that the tragedy of maternal mortality is a question of how much the life of a mother and a woman is considered worth.

The economic invisibility of women is because their work, much that it counts, is not counted.

Few women are in the position of decision making about the allocation of resources, particularly in countries where these resources are scarce.
The third part of our message from this conference to the lady of Laetoli is that we promise and yes, we can. We make a solemn pledge to eradicate preventable maternal mortality and morbidity. We make this promise and we know we can deliver on it.

Let me share with you four reasons why I am confident that we can.
YES, WE CAN

700 plus distinguished participants gathered in this conference, representing a community of experts and advocates, women and men, young and old, from the North and South, East and West, from different disciplines and different walks of life. From the excellent presentations they made, with emphasis on the quality of care, and the vast knowledge they shared, they are sending a clear message: YES, WE CAN.

First, here we have the 700 plus distinguished participants gathered in this conference, representing a community of experts and advocates, women and men, young and old, from the North and South, East and West, from different disciplines and different walks of life. From the excellent presentations they made, with emphasis on the quality of care, and the vast knowledge they shared, they are sending a clear message: YES, WE CAN.

YES, WE CAN

For those of us who have been in this noble movement from the beginning, and who are now waiting for their exit from this world stage, it is most gratifying to see this infusion of new blood in the safe motherhood movement, with a younger generation now taking the lead.
Then, there is this infusion of new and young blood in the safe motherhood movement. It is most gratifying for those of us who have been in this noble movement from the beginning, those who have already left this world stage, and those who are waiting for their exit. A younger generation has stepped in and is now taking the lead.

Second, the world is making progress.
As Dr Ana Langer pointed out in her introduction to the Conference programme, between 1990 and 2010 maternal death dropped worldwide by nearly 50 percent.

Third our host country gave us a lesson from a committed country that yes, we can.
A committed country

In Tanzania, maternal health has become a national priority and we feel fortunate to have the strong committed support of President Jakaya Kikwete and First Lady Salma Kikwete. This support, coupled with the incredible work of dozens of groups in Tanzania dedicated to this issue, resulted in the maternal mortality ratio falling 25 percent between 2005 and 2010.

Guerino Chalamilla

Dr Chalamilla tells us that when maternal health became a national priority in Tanzania, and with strong support of President Jakaya Kikwete, and first lady Salma Kikwete, maternal mortality ratio fell by 25 percent within only five years between 2005 and 2010.

YES, WE CAN

- GLOBAL Maternal Health CONFERENCE 2013
- The world is making progress
- A lesson from the host country
- The power of women
The power of women

Women are making advances, in strides and in all parts of the world. They are claiming and gaining back their God-given human rights, and they are asserting their real worth. They have abandoned the language of silence and are making their voices heard.

True, in several parts of the world, women still have some steep mountains to climb. But women are not for turning.

Last but not least, women are making advances, in strides and in all parts of the world. They are claiming and gaining back their God-given human rights, and they are asserting their real worth. They have abandoned the language of silence and are making their voices heard. True, in several parts of the world, women still have some steep mountains to climb. But women are not for turning.
Yes, women still have some steep mountains to climb. Past month young fifteen year old Malala was shot in Pakistan because she dared not only to educate herself, but also to encourage other girls to educate themselves. She left hospital last week.

**Women are not for turning**

“Every girl in Swat is Malala. We will educate ourselves. We will win. They can't defeat us.”

A classmate of Malala Yousafzai

But women are not for turning. The response of a classmate of Malala after the shooting was “Every girl in Swat is Malala. We will educate ourselves. We will win. They can't defeat us”
YES, WE CAN AND YES, WE WILL.

I will not be around when our beautiful dream of a world where all women have their right to safe motherhood, will come true. But I pin my hope on a trusted younger generation who will carry the torch forward, and on the power of women, backed by the science and the health profession, and supported by national commitment and the global community.

We hereby declare that yes we can, and yes we will. I will not be around when our beautiful dream will come true, the dream of a world where all women have their right to safe motherhood. But I pin my hope on a trusted younger generation who will carry the torch forward, and on the power of women, backed by the science and the health profession, and supported by national commitment and the global community.

Your Excellency
We are leaving your great country and this conference full of this big hope for the noble cause of safe motherhood for all. We thank you for hosting us and giving us this big hope. Hope is a great thing to have.
A message of hope

Hope is good for breakfast, but bad for supper.
Hope is good when you take it and go to work on it.
Hope is bad when you take it and go to sleep on it.
Let us have hope and go to work on it.

But let us also remember the wisdom of the saying: Hope is good for breakfast, but bad for supper. Hope is good when you take it and go to work on it. Hope is bad when you take it and go to sleep on it. Let us have this big hope and go to work on it.

Assanteni. Thank you
There are moments at medical conferences, very rare moments, where an individual is able, though the power of their presence, their words, and their delivery, to take an audience to a place it didn’t know existed. Mahmoud Fathalla raised his audience to its feet and reduced many to tears last week as he closed the Global Maternal Health Conference, held in Arusha, Tanzania.

After three days of discussion about the health of women during pregnancy and childbirth, Fathalla, for over 40 years a professor of obstetrics and gynaecology at Assiut University, Egypt, and a former director of WHO’s special programme of research on human reproduction, closed the meeting with a message to the Lady of Laetoli. The Lady refers to 70 footprints discovered by Mary Leakey in 1976. They date from 3.6 million years ago, and analysis of their size and shape suggests she was carrying a small child on her hip. We all share a direct connection to this woman walking through the plains of modern Tanzania, he said, thanks to the passage of her mitochondrial genes to multiple new generations of mothers. The conference was being held in the land of the mothers of mothers.

Mahmoud Fathalla offered three messages.
First, “we thank and we appreciate”. Women have made sacrifices and endured risks to bring the gift of life to our world. The natural rate of maternal mortality, without medical intervention, may be as high as 1000–1500 deaths per 100 000 live births. Given that the number of human beings ever born is somewhere around 107 602 707 791, a vast number of women have given their lives to replenish the earth.

Second, “we regret and we apologize”. Despite knowing how to save women’s lives, we still leave women to die. Why? “Because societies have yet to make the decision that their lives are worth saving.”

Finally, “we promise and yes, we can”. We will eradicate preventable maternal mortality. Although Professor Fathalla said that he would not be alive to see the eradication of maternal mortality himself, the presence of a new generation of researchers and health professionals dedicated to defeating maternal mortality convinced him that this goal would, one day, come to pass.

Women “have abandoned the language of silence”. He concluded his message by quoting the words of a friend of Malala Yousafzai, the 15-year-old girl from Pakistan who survived an assassination attempt last year after campaigning for girls’ education in the Taliban-controlled Swat region of the country: “We will win. They can’t defeat us.” At that point, the audience rose, united in respect and admiration for this man, the grandfather of maternal mortality.