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## EUROPEAN PARLIAMENTARIANS URGE THEIR GOVERNMENTS TO PAY MORE ATTENTION TO DEVELOPMENT AID ON REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

A Delegation of 13 European parliamentarians has visited Ethiopia for a week to get a closer look at the unmet needs of sexual reproductive health and rights (SRH & R) in the country. The parliamentarians represent national parliament from Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, France and the European Parliament. The visit is being jointly organized by the Inter European Parliamentary Forum on Population and Development (IEPPFD), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and Family Guidance Association of Ethiopia (FGAE).

They have met people living with HIV/AIDS, learned about deeply rooted harmful traditions such as early child marriage, abduction of girls and female genital cutting/mutilation (FGC/M).

"Girls and women need to learn their rights to their own body", says *Carina Hägg*, Member of the Swedish Parliament and Vice President of IEPFPD.

"Through field visits and meetings with officials we have been concretely introduced to the big challenges this country is facing as regard to SRH&R, and what potentialities Ethiopian women represent. However, a lot still needs to be done to ensure women are educated and healthy actors in the development process", says *Veronique Matthieu*, French Member of the European Parliament and Vice President of the Working Group on Sexual and Reproductive Health in the European Parliament.

In the Ethiopian poverty reduction strategy women empowerment is one of the pillars which also has been emphasised by many of the officials and service providers met.

"In order to reach these very important goals – that has already been emphasised in the MDGs – we want to encourage the Ethiopian government to channel more resources so that those most in need have an access to full range of health care including SRH&R. We as parliamentarians can use our influence to advocate on behalf of SRH&R", says *Carina Hägg*.

In many African countries maternal mortality is a major killer. Ethiopia is one of the most affected countries.

"When nearly half of the population is at risk of dying because of pregnancy related complications it is very hard for the country to develop. We have also witnessed the difficulties of reaching remote areas and the lack of medical staff – both issues which need due attention", says *Kirsten Brosbol*, Member of the Danish Parliament.

Men's attitudes and sexual behaviour are key factors in reduction of HIV/AIDS, unwanted pregnancies and maternal mortality.

"If we really want to improve sexual health for women and youth, and change gender roles, men need to speak out and show real commitment", says *Miguel Ángel Martín Soledad*, Member of the Spanish Parliament.

"We have seen some excellent youth projects that addressed the issue of gender and particularly HIV/AIDS awareness. We realised how difficult it is for women to convince their partner to use a condom but we have also met many dedicated fathers and husbands who want to improve the lives of their wives and daughters", says *Janina Andersson*, Member of the Finnish Parliament.

During their study tour parliamentarians have witnessed the negative consequences of deeply rooted traditions - but they also sensed the willingness to change among the people.

"Reflecting on my field visit I was struck by the persistence of FGC/M. This harmful practise has to be stopped. These traditions are posing severe health risks and constitute violations of the bodily integrity of girls and women. In order to meet the MDGs of reducing maternal and child mortalities, this practise has to be ended", says *Hilde Vautmans*, Member of the Belgian Parliament.

After visiting UNFPA supported Early Marriage programme in Amhara Region, *Gitte Lillelund Bech* Member of the Danish Parliament is convinced that no boy or girl should be made to marry below the age of 18, and the legislation already in place should be strictly applied.

"These girls are denied the proven benefits of education, which include improved health, lower fertility and increased economic productivity, and tragically are more likely to die from pregnancy related complications", says *Gitte Lillelund Bech*.

This parliamentary group from across Europe and cross party lines supports the importance of SRH&R as fundamental to poverty reduction. "The delegation has been Impressed and Inspired by the Ethiopian people's dedication to improve SRH of those in greatest need". says *Neil Datta*, Secretary of IEPFPD.

Journalists are warmly welcome the **press briefing in the end of the visit on Saturday May 13th at 9.30 am at Sheraton Addis**. Please note the changed time of the press briefing.

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