

For Immediate Release

June 20, 2005

Contact: Glynnis Breen
202 887-0500 x26
GBreen@WiteckCombs.com

**GLOBAL WOMEN LEADERS DEMAND ACTION AND LEADERSHIP
FOR WOMEN'S HEALTH CRISIS**

**America's Madeleine Albright and Ireland's Mary Robinson Express Dismay about Failing
Policies; Call for Shift in Resource Priorities**

(Queenstown, MD)– Addressing tragic international rates in maternal mortality, rising HIV/AIDS infection rates and the absence of adequate health care, leaders from around the world gathered and spoke in one voice to demand action for the global crisis in women's health.

At the conclusion of a three-day conference ending on June 7 and hosted by former President of Ireland Mary Robinson, former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright and Columbia University's Allan Rosenfield, participants authored and signed a declaration calling upon all political leaders to recognize the critical importance and appalling state of women's health. (A full text of their call to action is available at www.eginitiative.org.)

Keynote speaker, Madeleine K. Albright, former U.S. Secretary of State, stressed that "without such leadership, little good will happen."

The conference held at the Aspen Institute's Wye River Campus in Queenstown Maryland, brought together leaders from 15 nations and was jointly organized by Realizing Rights: The Ethical Globalization Initiative (EGI), The Council of Women World Leaders (CWWL), and Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health.

Albright spoke of the need to address one of the two leading causes of death among women of reproductive age in developing countries – pregnancy related complications. "Every year these complications kill an estimated 600,000 women. These tragedies command far less attention than terrorism because these horrors occur off camera and out of sight in dusty villages and shantytowns where nothing grows, except the appetites of small children."

Albright continued, "While President Bush and Prime Minister Blair commit the U.S. and Britain to provide more debt relief for Africa, conference organizers urge both leaders and other world figures to give the same priority to women's global health.

"Solving the global conflicts and challenges begins with securing women's and girls' health for the next generations," urges Mary Robinson, former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and current Executive Director of EGI. "Universal access to health care is not a myth or a dream. It is a human right. We cannot implement that human right without effective health systems. We need a worldwide movement – led by women – to make that simple message stick."

The conference and its resulting "Call to Action," focused on these starkly revealing human statistics that occur every minute of every day:

- 5 more women join the 20 million women currently living with HIV/AIDS;
- 190 women conceive an unwanted or mistimed pregnancy;
- one woman dies while giving birth; and
- countless women and girls suffer the health consequences of malnutrition, chronic and communicable diseases that disproportionately affect women, gender-based violence, harmful traditional practices, and war and civil conflict.

Renowned global health expert and Dean of Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health Allan Rosenfield stressed the urgency of the issues as they impact women: "Dramatically

decreasing the number of women dying from pregnancy-related complications is doable NOW, and it is simply incomprehensible how little attention has been given by governments to this issue. We must state categorically that women's lives count, and we DO know what needs to be done." He added, "Similarly, the impact of HIV/AIDS on women, and in particular, on girls 13-18 years old, is a tragedy of unprecedented magnitude, which can be addressed with interventions that already exist."

Featured speaker, Marian Wright Edelman, CEO and Founder of the Children's Defense Fund explained why she chose to attend, "This conference is extraordinary because it affirms what does work, what can be done, and now we just have to get the right people to do it."

Editors Note: Participants are available for comment as appropriate.

Founded by Mary Robinson, Former President of Ireland and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, EGI's Realizing Rights: The Ethical Globalization Initiative's (EGI) mission is to make human rights the compass which charts a course for globalization that's fair, just and benefits all by fostering more equitable international trade and development policies, strengthening responses to the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Africa and shaping more humane migration policies. For more information visit www.eginitiative.org.

The Council of Women World Leaders is a network of current and former women prime ministers, presidents and cabinet ministers whose mission is to mobilize the highest-level women leaders globally for collective action on issues of critical importance to women and equitable development. For more information visit www.womenworldleaders.org.

The only accredited school of public health in New York City, and among the first in the nation Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health provides instruction, research, and service opportunities to more than 850 graduate students in pursuit of masters and doctoral degrees in the areas of biostatistics, environmental health sciences, epidemiology, health policy and management, population and family health, and sociomedical sciences. For more information visit www.mailman.hs.columbia.edu.

###