

# Forum of African First Ladies Against Breast & Cervical Cancer



**Statement by the First Ladies of Ghana, Niger, South Africa,  
Swaziland, Uganda, Zambia and The Gambia**

**A call for greater focus and investment in addressing women's cancers**

**July 26, 2010**

**At the fourth annual Stop Cervical Cancer in Africa meeting, we the First Ladies of Ghana, Niger, South Africa, Swaziland, Uganda, Zambia and The Gambia present in Accra commit ourselves as champions of one of the most critical health issues of our time—the growing burden of women's cancers, especially cervical and breast cancer—in the world's poorest nations.**

**As leaders, women, mothers and daughters, we realize that women's lives and health are in a critical transition period around the globe. Increased global awareness and resources have contributed to promising improvements in women's health issues, including reducing infectious diseases and maternal mortality in developing countries. Though these challenges remain significant in places, increasingly, women in the developing world suffer from a new wave of non-communicable diseases, with women's cancers cutting lives short, weakening families, wrecking economic havoc and threatening the social fabric of communities.**

**Today, 90% of deaths from non-communicable diseases occur in the developing world.<sup>1</sup> Cervical, breast and other women's cancers take a tremendous toll on women's health in developing countries. Over 80% of all cervical cancer deaths occur in developing countries where girls and women do not have access to prevention services such as education, HPV vaccination and life-saving pre-cancer screening and early treatment.<sup>2</sup> Breast cancer, once relatively unknown in developing countries, is rising rapidly, often appearing in women 10 to 15 years earlier than in developed countries.<sup>3</sup> With no simple detection tools and tragically insufficient treatment options, breast cancer is quickly becoming the number one cancer killer of women in some developing countries.<sup>4</sup> Today, cervical cancer and breast cancers kill more than half a million women in developing countries each year—greater than current estimates for maternal mortality globally. The biggest tragedy is that these deaths are largely preventable as the disease is treatable when detected early. Our failure to act on what we know as preventable and treatable is causing premature loss of life of thousands of women throughout the developing world.**

**We commit ourselves to work closely with our Heads of State, Ministries of Health, Education, Finance and Foreign Affairs, UN missions and civil society leaders to champion greater awareness about the burden of women's cancers and other non-**

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1 Presentation to NCD Net by Dr. Alwan, "Raising the priority of NCDs in development work at global and national levels," Data from Global Burden of Disease, 2004 Update, World Health Organization. 2004.

2 Murry, M. "Progress in preventing cervical cancer: Updated evidence on vaccination and screening," Outlook, Vol. 27. No. 2, 2010.

3 Knaul F, Bystreo F, Ha, E. and Langer, A. Breast cancer: why link early detection to reproductive health interventions in developing countries? *Salud pública Méx*; 51(suppl.2.):s220-s227. 2009.

4 The Lancet, Volume 374, Issue 9701, Page 1567, 7 November 2009.

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communicable diseases in our own countries, and to work for improved financing and leadership for the prevention of women's cancers worldwide.

As First Ladies, we pledge to mobilize our diplomatic and public health leadership to ensure women's cancers feature prominently this September at the United Nations General Assembly Development Summit on the MDGs and at the United Nations High Level Summit on Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) scheduled for September 2011. To achieve this, we pledge to work with our governments to strongly urge that the UN General Assembly, UN Secretary General, the African Union, national headquarter offices of UNFPA, WHO, World Bank, UNICEF and UNAIDS and heads of our national Parliaments prioritize improved cervical and breast cancer prevention and treatment. We hope that these efforts will complement initiatives by civil society leaders and other governments to see that the international community aligns its resources and attention to the health needs of our time.

With these first steps here in Accra, we commit ourselves to championing a new vision of women's health that meets the needs of our mothers, sisters and our daughters today and into the future.

H.E. Mrs. Ernestina Naadu Mills  
First Lady of the Republic of Ghana

*Ernestina Naadu Mills*

H.E. Mrs. Djibo Salou Fati  
First Lady of the Republic of Niger

*Djibo Salou Fati*

H.R.H. Nomsa E. Matsebula  
Queen of the Kingdom of Swaziland

*Nomsa E. Matsebula*

H.E. Madam Tobeka Madiba Zuma  
First Lady of the Republic of South Africa

*Tobeka Madiba Zuma*

*f* H.E. Madam Zeineb Yahya Jammeh  
First Lady of the Republic of The Gambia

*Zeineb Yahya Jammeh*  
HON. FAYOL LAMIN FAYE

H.E. Madam Janet Museveni (MP)  
First Lady of the Republic of Uganda

*for Janet Museveni*  
RWSL-CCA Wanzel (MP)  
D. SPEAKER, UGANDA

H.E. Mrs. Thandiwe Banda  
First Lady of the Republic of Zambia

*for Thandiwe Banda*  
Mrs Mwitwa Holmes