

Rt Hon Helen Clark, Chair of PMNCH Board.

Speech at Clinton Global Initiative

**Session: “1.8 Billion Futures” on committing to adolescent health
and wellbeing**

Tuesday, September 18, 2023

New York Hilton Midtown,

1335 6th Ave, New York, NY 10019

Good afternoon, everyone.

We are here today to commit to the well-being of our world's 1.8 billion adolescents and young people - a generation with so much potential, but also one facing many challenges.

This generation is both impacted by and troubled by the climate crisis. It is growing up in a world which is polarised - and often in countries which are too. It has witnessed a global pandemic. Technological change is a driving force in all our lives.

All of these have brought new challenges – not least an increased risk of mental health issues, more exposure to gender-based violence – including in the cybersphere, and deepening poverty for many. These are impacting young people's health and well-being now, and will shape their futures and those of generations to come.

These 1.8 billion young lives make up just over a fifth of the world's population. Yet, their voices are often left out of the decision-making processes which are shaping their lives. With just seven years left until the target date for meeting the Sustainable Development Goals, we need to act urgently to deliver for every adolescent on that agenda.

So, what can we do?

First and foremost, countries must prioritise adolescent health and well-being in plans and strategies, and allocate specific budgets for that. Between 2003 and 2015, only 1.6 per cent of development assistance for health was dedicated to adolescent health, despite its critical importance. We have to do better – the costs of underinvestment are high.

As well, we must recognise that adolescents are not a homogenous group. They have diverse needs and identities, and must be supported accordingly.

But our work can't stop there. We must also advocate for new adolescent- and youth-focused indicators to measure progress on achieving the SDGs. And to achieve them, we do need strong global partnerships. The Partnership for Maternal, Newborn & Child Health (PMNCH) with its more than 1450 partners from

192 countries is committed to working across sectors and engaging with the voices and ideas of young people.

Our very active Adolescent and Youth Constituency (AYC) has supported us to ensure meaningful engagement of young people in our work. We were pleased to support the development of the Global Consensus Statement on Meaningful Adolescent and Youth Engagement (MAYE).

The PMNCH Board also voted unanimously to include young people in leadership positions across our structures, including by creating a Board Vice Chair seat for a young person. Overall, more than twenty of our leadership seats are earmarked and remunerated for young people. PMNCH is proud of its commitment to intergenerational partnerships.

Our major initiative this year is the *1.8 Billion Young People for Change Campaign*. It is gathering the voices of over one million adolescents and young people, and mobilising financial and political support for adolescent health and wellbeing, in the lead up to the Global Forum for Adolescents on 11-12 October.

The commitment of the private sector and philanthropic foundations to adolescent well-being matters greatly. Both can play pivotal roles by investing in initiatives promoting the health

and well-being of adolescents and creating safe spaces for young people to thrive.

As well, by integrating well-being practices into operations, the private sector and philanthropy contribute to society and foster a healthier and more productive future workforce.

When the private sector and philanthropy prioritise adolescent well-being, they inspire others to join the cause. This catalyses collective action and meaningful multi-stakeholder partnerships.

Commitment here today is not just an option; it is a necessity. With resources, expertise, and influence, we can amplify our efforts. Together, we can secure the health and well-being of 1.8 billion young lives and enhance the future for us all.