



STATEMENTS SUBMITTED ON BEHALF OF GLOBAL HEALTH COUNCIL (GHC) TO THE SIXTY-EIGHTH WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY

Meeting:

Sixty-eighth World Health Assembly (A68/1)

Agenda Item:

18.3.1 H. Newborn health (resolution WHA67.10)

Statement:

Chairperson, Honorable Ministers, distinguished delegates, colleagues:

Thank you for the opportunity to deliver this statement on behalf of Global Health Council and the Global Alliance to Prevent Prematurity and Stillbirth, an initiative of Seattle Children's (GAPPS).

In response to the fact that the leading cause of death up to age 5 worldwide is now complications of preterm birth, and that the causes and mechanisms of preterm birth remain largely unknown, we recommend the World Health Organization call for each member state to commit funds for preterm birth research.

An estimated 15 million babies are born preterm every year and nearly one million do not survive their first month of life. While many of those infants could be saved if adequate care and treatment were available in all settings, prevention strategies are largely unknown. Even with widespread utilization of known prevention strategies like cervical cerclage, progesterone and smoking cessation, more than 12 million babies would still be born preterm every year.

The causes of preterm birth are multiple, complex and poorly understood – an intricate interplay of social, genetic and biological determinants. Multiple risk factors are associated with preterm birth, including poverty, family history, infections, nutritional deficiencies, race and ethnicity, and emotional and physical stress. Advancing prevention must therefore come through a comprehensive research agenda that will reveal the underlying mechanisms that cause preterm birth.

Just as each country has been called to develop a country-level response to the Every Newborn Action Plan for the care of newborns, each country should also commit funds for scientific investigation of preterm birth and its prevention. We call upon the World Health Organization to recommend a commitment to fund research efforts.

Thank you.