

H.E. Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif  
Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan  
Prime Minister's Secretariat  
Islamabad

November 18, 2014

### **Promoting safe motherhood in Pakistan**

Your Excellency,

At the Nordic Congress of Obstetrics and Gynaecology June 2014 the subject of safe motherhood in Pakistan was raised in a lecture delivered by a distinguished gynaecologist, Dr. Shershah Syed, from Pakistan. The Nordic Federation of Societies of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (NFOG) at the congress in June, attended by over 1000 delegates from the Nordic countries and wider afield are deeply concerned regarding the difficult situation relating to women's health in Pakistan.

Urgent initiatives to remedy this situation are called for. This letter has therefore been sent to local as well as central authorities in Pakistan. As gynecologists we recommend focusing on the following four priority areas:

#### **Reducing deliveries attended only by unskilled attendants**

UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, confirms that less than half of deliveries among women in Pakistan are attended by skilled personnel, with the proportion being alarmingly worse in rural areas. Too few midwives and obstetricians as well as poor access to hospitals leads to high rates of severe complications; 1/110 mothers die, 46/1000 babies are stillborn and additional 42/1000 children die during the new-born period.

#### **Postpone the age of first pregnancy and ban child marriage**

Due to young age at first pregnancy, Pakistan has one of the world's highest rates of obstetrical fistulas, a documented prevalence of 0.45% (or 1/222) of parous women in rural Pakistan living with this devastating condition. Pregnancies at very young age, as well as lack of skilled delivery services, are among the main reasons for these high rates. The Institute for Social Justice and the Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey state that up to half of all girls in the 15-18 year age group had been pregnant. The possibility of family planning to masses in city slums and rural areas in Pakistan should be present.

The Pakistani Council of Islamic Ideology (CII) still claims that girls are ready for marriage when they reach puberty and in April 2014 announced that legislation banning child marriage was anti-Islamic. We urge CII to reconsider its position and recommend a national strategy to postponing the age of first pregnancy.

#### **Increase access to and attendance to schooling for girls**

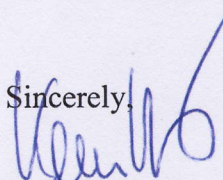
UNESCO statistics confirm that girls' schooling is much poorer than that of boys; overall official literacy rates in Pakistan are 46%, for girls only 26%. UNESCO's estimates of these numbers are even more serious, namely an overall literacy of 26% and for girls only 12%, at least in some parts of Pakistan. We recommend a national strategy for increasing literacy among girls.

**Eradication of violence against women**

Violence against women (honour killings, sexual violence as well as general violence) is highly prevalent in Pakistan. This violence affects women both directly and indirectly: female health workers (obstetricians and midwives) being on call at home risk being assaulted on their way to attend deliveries, thus both actual assaults as well as the fear of being assaulted may delay the arrival of skilled health workers and thus increase delivery complications. This needs to be combatted with the government of Pakistan taking a clear stand on this issue of eradication of violence against women.

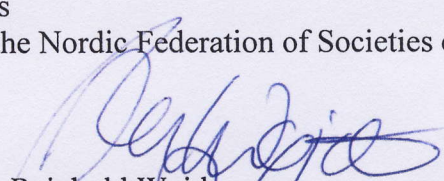
In our past co-operation with colleagues from Pakistan, through the International Federation of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, FIGO, the NFOG commits itself to assist Pakistani colleagues in the way we can through contacts with them, through training opportunities in our countries and by other forms of assistance that we could provide.

Sincerely,



Knut Hordnes

President of the Nordic Federation of Societies of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (NFOG)



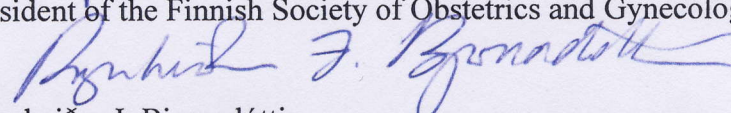
Karen Reinhold Wøjdemann

President of the Danish Society of Obstetrics and Gynecology



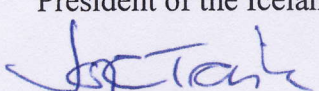
Juha Rasanen

President of the Finnish Society of Obstetrics and Gynecology



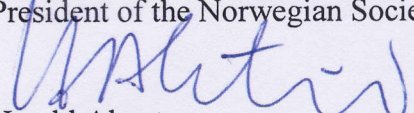
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