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New Presidential Initiative Launches in Mali, Strikes at the Epicenter of the Global Maternal and Child Mortality Crisis

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Bamako – A new Presidential Initiative announced today in the West African nation of Mali aims to halt two of the world’s oldest health crises: maternal and child death.

Mali, with maternal and child mortality rates among the six highest in the world, is at the epicenter of the global health crisis. One in ten Malian children currently die before their fifth birthday.

But Mali’s leaders are now looking to turn the country from the epicenter of the crisis to the vanguard of the solution.

Today, Mali’s President announced the launch of a sweeping national healthcare reform. Mali’s national plan will provide care to all children under five and pregnant women at no charge to the patient at primary health care level. Contraceptives will also become free nationwide. To connect patients with this care, the government plans to incorporate Community Health Workers into the health system across the country.

The President committed to “increasing the national budget allocation to health” and acknowledged the continuous commitment and financial support of international partners to Mali. “It is at this price, and through these reforms, that the Government of Mali, in collaboration with the international community, will make Mali a leader in health sector reform on the African continent”, noted the President.

In removing out-of-pocket payment for health care, Mali is taking historic action. “Through this engagement of the government of Mali and all its partners, supporting and pushing forward this reform, Mali can create the best community health system on the continent, and a model for the world”, noted Ari Johnson, professor of global health sciences at University of California, San Francisco, and CEO of the NGO Muso, during a video address to the conference.

Leaders of preeminent global health organizations reached out to offer their profound support for the reform.

Director General of the World Health Organisation, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, expressed his support for Mali in taking steps toward achieving universal health coverage: “We often say that universal health coverage is a political choice. I’m delighted to see that Mali is making that choice.”

Michel Sidibé, director of UNAIDS and a Malian himself, offered his backing via a video message: “I am convinced that this reform will help us to make progress more quickly, and to expand the offer of

care, centered on the individual.... This reform will permit us to address difficult questions of sustainability, and to assure that all necessary services are integrated."

In a video message, Mark Edington, Head of Grant Management for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB, and Malaria, applauded Mali for the reform's focus on primary healthcare, declaring: "The introduction of free care for a packet of free services for pregnant women and children under five is a major advancement in Mali. We recognize this effort of the Minister of Health of Mali in this reform and we encourage him in his ambition to improve the health of Malians. We know that the challenges are large and we reiterate the engagement of the Global Fund to assist you in implementing this reform."

Tim Evans of the World Bank offered his support, remarking "We are thrilled to accompany you toward the success of your ambitious reforms toward universal health coverage." Dr. Evans, the Senior Director of Health, Nutrition and Population at the World Bank Group, further recognized "the effort of the Government of Mali in the health sector as a strategic priority toward economic development, knowing that the improvement of health and nutrition are two indispensable elements in the formation of human capital : this human capital will accelerate economic growth and allow the achievement of sustainable development goals."

Oumar Seydi of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation highlighted the tremendous need and opportunity for improved quality of care in Mali, as he noted that "if Mali succeeds in converting its clinics to efficacious health centers, with well trained, well equipped teams, thousands of mothers and newborns can be saved... and Mali can be an example for other nations."

More than 30 years ago, the Bamako Initiative launched in Mali during the World Health Organization Regional Assembly. Signed by health ministers from across the continent, the Bamako Initiative popularized user fees, asking patients to pay for their own health care costs out of pocket. Following the Bamako Initiative, countries across Africa adopted user fees.

In this context, Mali's historic decision to remove user fees for pregnant women and children may signal the end of this harmful practice, with countries increasingly transitioning to paying for their citizens' health care through prepayment in the form of taxes and insurance premiums.

Beginning with today's National Healthcare Reform launch, the Malian government plans to roll out phase one of the reform over the next four years with a focus on primary care, deploying Community Health Workers and removing fees for mothers and children nationwide by 2022. Change will not be easy. The reform will require over 120 million dollars annually of additional funding by 2022. While the Government has committed to an increased budget allocation to health, the renewed financial and strategic commitment of Mali's enduring partners will also be vital including the Dutch Embassy, the Canadian Cooperation, the World Bank, the French Cooperation, USAID, Global Fund, GAVI, UNICEF and UNFPA. New partners including the Global Financing Facility and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation are also stepping forward.

Following today's announcement and reform commitment, Mali becomes a model of change and reform in sub-Saharan Africa.