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INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR PEOPLE OF

AFRICAN DESCENT

REGIONAL MEETING FOR EUROPE, CENTRAL ASIA AND NORTH AMERICA ON THE
INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR PEOPLE OF AFRICAN DESCENT

Organized by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
23 – 24 November 2017



Black Mamas Matter Alliance (BMMA)

Statement on the Regional Meeting themes of Recognition, Justice, and Development

Greetings to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and Coordinator of the International Decade for People of African Descent. My name is Angela Doyinsola Aina, and I am a Public Health Professional, a Black Maternal Justice Advocate, and am first generation American – daughter of Nigerian immigrants to the U.S.

I am here representing the Black Mamas Matter Alliance to raise the alarm of the high numbers of Maternal Deaths experienced by black women in the United States of America and globally.

The growing number of deaths and complications to women in pregnancy and childbirth in the United States is a human rights crisis. The U.S. is one of only 17 countries, worldwide, and the only country with an advanced economy where the rate of maternal mortality is rising. Between 1990 and 2013, the maternal mortality ratio (MMR) in the U.S. more than doubled from 12 to 28 maternal deaths out of every 100,000 live births. In 1940, when maternal mortality data was first collected by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and compiled in a national database, Black women were twice as likely to die from pregnancy related complications than white women. By 1990, Black women were approximately three times as likely to die from pregnancy-related complications. This occurred while the overwhelming majority of countries dramatically reduced the incidence of maternal mortality and despite the fact that the U.S. spends twice as much as any other country on annual costs for hospitalization during pregnancy and childbirth. Today, Black women are still, nearly four times more likely to die from pregnancy related complications than white women in the United States. Black women are two times more likely to suffer from severe maternal morbidity (such as heart attack, shock, blood clot, or hysterectomy) than their white counterparts. What's even more sobering is that Black infants are more likely to be stillborn and die in their first year of life than white infants. These racial disparities exist across income and education levels, and is due to structural racism, gender oppression and social determinants of health inequities experienced by blacks in America. And

these are the contributing factors that intensify the dismal health statistics of black women's maternal health outcomes in the US.

Black Mamas Matter Alliance (BMMA) is a Black women-led cross-sectoral Alliance working to transform maternal health, rights, and justice! We envision a world where Black mamas have the Rights, Respect, and Resources to Thrive before, during, and after pregnancy.

BMMA promotes a human rights based approach to eliminating racial disparities in maternal health, seeks government accountability for implementing human rights standards related to sexual, reproductive, and maternal health, and recognizes that racial disparities in maternal health are part of a broader pattern of structural racism, gendered oppression, and human rights violations experienced by people of African descent.

BMMA requests that the U.S. government **RECOGNIZE and make INVESTMENTS** in black women's leadership, including reproductive and birth justice black women-led organizations; our maternity care work, and in our ingenuity in solving the problems that impact our communities.

BMMA advocates for laws and policies that will improve the health and survival of women of African descent, including greater access to health care, improved government data and monitoring of maternal deaths and racial disparities, programs that support Black girls, women, and mothers, and increased participation of affected communities in health-related decision-making.

Further, BMMA centers Black and African-immigrant women's voices and leadership, raises awareness about maternal health and the role of racism in the U.S. maternal health crisis, celebrates the knowledge that exists in Black communities, guides researchers in developing projects that honor that knowledge, and brings civil society leaders together to address these issues.

BMMA seeks **JUSTICE** by acknowledging that the existing racial disparities in maternal health are the result of structural inequities, rooted in racialized gendered oppression, and calling for the adoption of measures that meaningfully address that legacy.

BMMA addresses **DEVELOPMENT** by advocating for the fair distribution of resources and opportunities, especially with regard to reproductive health care services. BMMA advocates for access to quality health services, free from discrimination, acknowledging that health also requires access to the underlying social determinants of health, such as adequate housing, employment, and education. BMMA's advocacy centers intersectionality, by addressing the specific needs and realities of women and girls of African descent, especially in the areas of maternal health and reproductive rights.

Finally, BMMA requests that the U.S. government, including its medical and public health systems, review and adapt our **policy toolkit**, make a real investment in black women's maternity care, and implement federal and state policies that promote affordable, comprehensive, and holistic maternal health care that is FREE of gender and racial discrimination.

We Thank You for the opportunity to speak today.