THE SECRETARY OF STATE WASHINGTON

March 8, 2012

Dear Friends:

It gives me great pleasure to extend my best wishes as you come together to celebrate International Women's Day; I would especially like to acknowledge participants gathered for the Community of Practice for Obstetric Fistula Providers in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Today provides an important opportunity for bringing together dedicated surgeons, partners from the Ministry of Health, local organizations, USAID, EngenderHealth, and UNFPA to discuss the successes and challenges of providing services in the DRC, and to move forward with a national strategy to address obstetric fistula. By working together as key stakeholders in the DRC, the Ministry of Health, UN agencies, USAID and implementing partners, healthcare workers, and the distinguished participants at this national meeting are making important strides toward addressing obstetric fistula treatment and prevention.

Facing difficult challenges every single day, the surgeons and health care providers at this meeting are truly heroes, committed to supporting Congolese women and girls by providing the high quality fistula services that are desperately needed to restore health, dignity, and lives. Your commitment to preventing fistula by increasing access to emergency obstetric services and family planning, and working with communities to prevent fistula from ever occurring, are crucial for our progress. USAID has also been a stalwart supporter for increasing access to quality fistula repair and prevention services. Since 2005, the agency has supported approximately 25,000 repairs across 14 countries in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia. And EngenderHealth's Fistula Care project and its partners have played a vital role in expanding access to fistula treatment and prevention activities with USAID support. We are making progress, but much still remains to be done.

Thank you all for your dedication and excellent efforts in support of women's health, empowerment, and growth. Your extraordinary commitment and work on behalf of fistula survivors is an inspiration.

With best wishes, I am

Sincerely yours,

Hillary Rogham Clinton