

REGIONAL MEETING FOR EUROPE, CENTRAL ASIA AND NORTH AMERICA ON THE
INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR PEOPLE OF AFRICAN DESCENT
23 – 24 November 2017



Black Mamas Matter Alliance (BMMA)
Statement on the Regional Meeting theme of Development

Good afternoon. I'm Elizabeth Dawes Gay and I am here on behalf of the Black Mamas Matter Alliance. The Black Mamas Matter Alliance envisions a world where Black mamas have the rights, respect, and resources to thrive before, during, and after pregnancy. That vision is a long way off because the United States has a serious problem.

The US is a place where Black mothers are allowed to die at disproportionately higher rates than white mothers. Where Black children can be shot down by police simply with impunity. The same ideology that permits violence perpetrated against our children and our communities is the same ideology that has allowed Black mothers to suffer from and die from pregnancy and childbirth unnecessarily.

The murders of Black people at the hands of police and domestic terrorists is one of the most hostile ways we observe racism in our country. But the persistent and perpetual devaluation of Black lives is also seen in how systems limit our access to health care, education, healthy food, right to a living wage, right to justice, and our right to clean water.

In the public health world, these factors such as education, employment and income, safety, discrimination, and political power are known as social determinants of health. Where we live, how we live, and how we are treated matters a great deal for our health and maternal health is no exception.

While access to health care is highly important, it simply isn't enough. We know that Black women who have financial and physical access to quality health care are still more likely than white women to have adverse pregnancy outcomes. Maternal mortality and morbidity among Black people is, at its core, tied to the experience of living while Black.

Yet, some people have the nerve to blame our health outcomes on us and not on the social, physical and political environment in which we live.

They say it's because we are too obese or because we have diabetes and high blood pressure before becoming pregnant or because we access prenatal care later than we should. They say that if we just did better we wouldn't have the problems that we have. But, they don't acknowledge that the disproportionately high rates of chronic disease in the Black community are a result of centuries of systemic oppression and social injustice that has denied and still denies Black people equal access to all of the resources we need to be healthy. The story isn't just that Black people must do better. The story is that the United States must do better.

With that said, I call on the United States government to take action to address issues under the theme of development. Specifically, I request that US policy ensure that Black people in the United States have adequate housing, transportation equity, nutritious food, clean water and environments free from toxins, fair treatment within the criminal justice system, safety and freedom from violence, and a living wage and equal economic opportunity.

Progress is possible with intentional action. Our lives depend on it. Thank you.