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## **Interfaith Roundtable for Action on Maternal/Child Health and Nutrition**

**Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (March 19, 2015)** – World Vision Ethiopia (WVE), in collaboration with USAID and Inter-Religious Council of Ethiopia, conducted an Interfaith Roundtable for Action on Maternal/Child Health and Nutrition today in Addis Ababa. The purpose of the event was to set common objectives and action steps as to how to fully integrate the engagement of faith leaders into maternal, newborn and child health work across the country.

On his opening remarks, H.E. Kebede Worku, state minister, Ministry of Health said, “despite the tremendous achievement there still number of mothers and children are dying due to preventable causes. Though the causes of these problems are known to be multifaceted, harmful traditional, socio cultural practices are major contributors to low maternal and child health services coverage. The role of religious leaders and institutions in addressing these challenges is tremendous. Acknowledging this, the Ministry of Health, IRCE, WVE and USAID in partnership have organized this round table to reinforce efforts already under way”.

The event is a follow up discussion of the recently held book launch by WVE, in collaboration with USAID, where religious leaders in Ethiopia pledged to collaborate on the efforts to improve maternal and child health and to meet MDG 5, which targets to reduce maternal mortality. In her keynote speech, U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia Patricia M. Haslach said, “Ending preventable child and maternal death by 2035 is one of the U.S. Government’s top priorities...Today is an occasion to take the next step toward strategic engagement of faith leaders and their respective communities in this important effort to have a sustainable impact on maternal and child health and nutrition in this country.”

Margaret Schuler, WVE national director, said, “WVE continues its effort to strengthen religious leader’s engagement for child well-being, we believe this meeting will be an opportunity for high level faith leaders, government officials, faith-based organizations, donors, NGO partners, UN agencies and other key stakeholders to come together to create a common faith-based initiative to reduce maternal and child deaths in Ethiopia.”

Defining the action steps, Pastor Zerihun Degu, General Secretary of Inter-Religious Council of Ethiopia said, “The commitment of the IRCE bases on the holy books believing that improving maternal/child health is considered as a good work in the doctrine of all religions. Taking this opportunity I would like to assure that IRCE will be actively engaged to improve maternal and child health throughout the country.”

**End Note:** WVE began its first intervention in Ethiopia in 1971 with relief and opened the Ethiopia office in 1975. During the 1984/85 drought, World Vision Ethiopia participated in a massive relief operation that saved the lives of millions of people. After an intensive relief and rehabilitation program, the organization developed a new integrated development approach, the objective of which was to ensure empowerment and transformational change. This approach led to the establishment of Area Programs (APs) in the 1990s that are still being implemented and continuously strengthened today. At present, World Vision Ethiopia operates in 68 ADPs and also implements emergency and refugee operations in South Omo, Borena, Dolo Ado, Tongo and Gambella.