

JOINT STATEMENT ON MATERNAL AND NEWBORN HEALTH

Accelerating Efforts to Save the Lives of Women and Newborns

Today, **25 September 2008**, as world leaders gather for the High-Level Event on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), we jointly pledge to intensify our support to countries to achieve Millennium Development Goal 5 "To Improve Maternal Health" – the MDG showing the least progress.

During the next five years, we will enhance support to the countries with the highest maternal mortality. We will support countries in strengthening their health systems to achieve the two MDG 5 targets of reducing the maternal mortality ratio by 75 per cent and achieving universal access to reproductive health by 2015. Our joint efforts will also contribute to achieving MDG 4 "To Reduce Child Mortality".

Every minute a woman dies in pregnancy or childbirth, over 500,000 every year. And every year over one million newborns die within their first 24 hours of life for lack of quality care. Maternal mortality is the largest health inequity in the world; 99 per cent of maternal deaths occur in developing countries – half of them in Africa. A woman in Niger faces a 1 in 7 chance during her lifetime of dying of pregnancy-related causes, while a woman in Sweden has 1 chance in 17,400.

Fortunately, the vast majority of maternal and newborn deaths can be prevented with proven interventions to ensure that every pregnancy is wanted and every birth is safe.

We will work with governments and civil society to strengthen national capacity to:

- Conduct needs assessments and ensure that health plans are MDG-driven and performance-based;
- Cost national plans and rapidly mobilize required resources;
- Scale-up quality health services to ensure universal access to reproductive health, especially for family planning, skilled attendance at delivery and emergency obstetric and newborn care, ensuring linkages with HIV prevention and treatment;
- Address the urgent need for skilled health workers, particularly midwives;
- Address financial barriers to access, especially for the poorest;
- Tackle the root causes of maternal mortality and morbidity, including gender inequality, low access to education – especially for girls, child marriage and adolescent pregnancy;
- Strengthen monitoring and evaluation systems.

In the countdown to 2015, we call on Member States to accelerate efforts for achieving reproductive, maternal and newborn health. Together we can achieve Millennium Development Goals 4 and 5.



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