



A GLOBAL CALL TO ACTION: STRENGTHEN MIDWIFERY TO SAVE LIVES AND PROMOTE HEALTH OF WOMEN AND NEWBORNS (6 June 2010)

Maternal Mortality: Still the greatest health and gender inequity in the world

We, midwives and other health professionals of the world and development partners, gathered here on the occasion of the Women Deliver Conference in Washington DC, June 2010, share the view that bold and unprecedented action is required to achieve Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 5: *Improve Maternal Health* and the newborn component of MDG4: *Reduce child mortality*. Today 99 per cent of maternal and newborn deaths occur in developing countries. Each year more than two million women and newborns die needlessly due to preventable causes related to pregnancy, childbirth and post-partum conditions. Millions more suffer disabilities. When a woman dies, her children are less likely to receive nutritious food and education. Saving women's lives and improving their health are key to achieving all of the MDGs.

We know what to do – it is a cost-effective investment

There is international consensus on the set of evidence-based and cost-effective solutions required to ensure that *every pregnancy is wanted, every birth is safe and every newborn is healthy*. Central to these interventions is a high quality workforce supported by a functioning health system. Midwives, as part of this workforce, provide the continuum of care needed by pregnant women and their newborns from the community to the hospital level.

Midwives and midwifery services save lives and promote health

Up to 90 per cent of maternal deaths can be prevented when midwives and personnel with midwifery skills are authorized and supported by the health system to practice their full set of competencies, including basic emergency obstetric and newborn care. In addition midwives improve the sexual and reproductive health of individuals and couples, including adolescents, by providing family planning services and counseling, and HIV prevention, including the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), some *334,000 midwives are needed* to fill the gaps in high-mortality countries by 2015.

A Call to Action to strengthen midwifery services

We pledge to join forces with governments, civil society, and other partners to continue supporting implementation of World Health Assembly Resolution 59.27 on Strengthening nursing and midwifery and initiating a global movement to strengthen midwifery services. This will ensure rapid progress in achieving MDG 5 and contribute to the achievement of MDGs 4 and 6 (to reduce child mortality; and combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases). In response to the UN Secretary General's Joint Action Plan for Women's and Children's Health, we call on all governments to increase investments in midwifery services now and to make this a high priority at the UN Summit on the Millennium Development Goals in September 2010 and beyond.

We call on governments to address the following vital areas:

1. **Education and training—Provide** education and training in the essential competencies for basic midwifery practice. Build institutional capacity, including strengthened clinical training, post-graduate programs and research. Increase South-South collaboration to expand the production of midwives with evidence-based quality training.
2. **Legislation and Regulation—Strengthen** legislative and regulatory frameworks to ensure midwives have appropriate standards of practice and are regulated to practice their full set of competencies as defined by the WHO and the International Confederation of Midwives (ICM). Also, ensure immediate notification of maternal deaths.
3. **Recruitment, retention and deployment—Implement** national, costed health workforce plans and strengthen management capacities of Ministries of Health regarding training, recruitment, retention and deployment of the midwifery workforce, as per *The 2008 Kampala Declaration and Agenda for Global Action on Health Workers* and which is vital to increasing access to midwifery services for poor and marginalized women.
4. **Association—Strengthen** national professional midwifery associations to promote the profession, improve standards of care, participate in policy making at regional and national levels, and establish closer collaboration with other professional organizations, especially obstetric and pediatric societies.

Finally, we call on development partners – particularly the G8 and G20 – to provide long-term support to countries seeking to strengthen midwifery services by investing in a midwifery workforce as a fundamental step towards a functioning primary health care system that can deliver for women and newborns, fostering a healthier future for all.