



International Day of the Midwife – 5 May 2009

The World Needs Midwives Now More Than Ever!

**Midwife numbers must be expanded to achieve Millennium Development Goals 4, 5 and 6 by 2015
350,000 more midwives are needed!**¹

The UN Millennium Development Goals Report 2008 states: *The high risk of dying in pregnancy or childbirth continues unabated in sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia ... little progress has been made in saving mothers' lives.* Over 60% of women in these areas of the world still do not have skilled care during childbirth. This report notes better progress for all of the MDG goals, apart from MDG5!² Yet all the goals are linked: until poverty and hunger are reduced, until diseases such as HIV and malaria are controlled, until there is more equality between men and women, until every child completes primary education, until all women have access to reproductive healthcare - then mothers and babies will continue to die.

Midwives are key healthcare providers in achieving MDG 5: *Improving Maternal Health*³

That is the clear message coming from the WHO, UNFPA, UNICEF and the World Bank: the four UN agencies that have recently united to pledge increased support to countries with the highest maternal mortality rates. They identified mortality in pregnancy and childbirth as the "highest health inequity in the world with over 99% of deaths occurring in the developing world". They committed to work with governments and civil society organizations to address the "urgent need for skilled health workers, particularly midwives".⁴

Midwives provide skilled newborn care to achieve MDG 4: *Reduce Child Mortality*⁵

Every year in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia more than 1 million infants die within their first 24 hours of life due to lack of adequate health services, including midwifery care. The midwives of the world understand that every childbearing woman deserves to give birth within a safe and supported environment for herself and her baby. Skilled midwifery care includes emergency care for both mothers and their newborns.

Midwives are essential to achieve MDG 6: *Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Other Diseases*

Thousands of pregnant women and hundreds of thousands of newborns die each year due to preventable disease. Throughout sub-Saharan Africa governments have recognized the primary role of midwives in reducing these devastating deaths. As essential frontline workers, midwives provide vaccines to newborns and children; they identify, counsel and treat pregnant women with HIV and AIDS, thus preventing mother-to-child transmission of HIV; they also provide anti-malarial drugs and bed nets to vulnerable pregnant women and their children, saving lives and promoting health.

The achievement of MDGs 4, 5 and 6 requires a global commitment to grow a strong, well educated midwifery workforce within functioning health service delivery systems.

The sense of urgency to achieve MDGs 4, 5 and 6 in the next six years is increasing daily. The ICM and the midwives of the world are committed to working with global partners to achieve these goals. The Confederation has grown to 91 member associations with 250,000 midwives in over 80 countries and has recently partnered with the UNFPA to strengthen midwifery education, regulation and associations in 40 low income countries. The ICM has also joined the White Ribbon Alliance (WRA) and Sarah Brown's Maternal Mortality Campaign to increase public awareness and apply political pressure on the G8 and G20 to make maternal and newborn health a global priority. The ICM recognizes that health delivery systems must be strengthened and the midwifery workforce must be increased to stop the needless deaths of millions of women and their newborns who will die in the next six years if immediate action is not taken now.

The world needs midwives now more than ever!

For more information contact ICM President Bridget Lynch or ICM Secretary General Agneta Bridges at +31 70 3060520 or e-mail a.bridges@internationalmidwives.org.

1. The World Health Report: Make every mother and child count. World Health Organization, 2005.

2. The Millennium Development Goals Report 2008. New York, USA: UN, 2008

3. MDG 5 Target: Reduce by three quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality ratio. UN, 2000.

4. Accelerating efforts to save the lives of women and newborns. WHO/UNFPA/UNICEF/World Bank. Joint statement: Sept. 2008.

5. MDG 4 Target: Reduce by two thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate. UN.