



UK PLEDGES £100 MILLION TO UNFPA TO MAKE CHILDBIRTH SAFER AND PROMOTE REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

Joint Press Release

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LONDON, -- Maternal deaths and unwanted pregnancies can be cut dramatically in countries around the globe after the British government today pledged £100 million pledged to UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, to achieve universal access for reproductive health.

“Maternal health can be improved through strengthened political commitment and the dedication of increased resources. Life or death is a political decision,” said Thoraya Ahmed Obaid, UNFPA Executive Director. “The United Kingdom’s generous investment in women will enable UNFPA to provide urgent, coordinated and sustained action to save mother’s lives. There can be no safe future without safe motherhood -- no woman should die giving life.”

The £100 million over five years was announced today by Douglas Alexander, the UK’s Secretary of State for International Development, who called on leaders of the world’s poorest countries, especially in Africa, to make women’s health a priority on the opening day of Women Deliver, a three-day global conference aimed to reduce maternal mortality.

“The death of a mother deprives a child, a family, a community and ultimately a county of one of its most valuable sources of health, happiness and prosperity,” said Alexander addressing delegates on the opening day of Women Deliver, a global conference aimed at reducing maternal mortality. “Every minute a woman dies from complications during pregnancy or childbirth. More than 10 million women have died in the last 20 years. This is a tragedy but so is the fact these deaths could have been prevented.”

To address this challenge, the UN General Assembly endorsed earlier this month a new target to achieve universal access to reproductive health as part of the Millennium Development Goal 5, which calls for the reduction maternal mortality by three quarters by 2015.

Although progress has been made in such countries as Egypt, Sri Lanka and Thailand, maternal deaths remain high, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. A woman in Africa faces a 1 in 26 lifetime risk of maternal death compared to 1 in 8,200 in the United Kingdom.

An estimated 720,000 unwanted pregnancies could be averted, 300,000 abortions could be prevented and the lives of 1,600 mothers and 22,000 infants could be saved for every £1 million invested in family planning, Alexander said.

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