

## UN chief kicks off drive to save more than 16 million women and children worldwide



MDG 5: improve maternal health

22 September 2010 – Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today began a massive drive to save the lives of over 16 million women and children, with more than \$40 billion already committed to scale up health services worldwide.

“The 21st century must be and will be different for every woman and every child,” **said** Mr. Ban, who launched the **Global Strategy** for Women’s and Children’s Health at UN Headquarters on the margins of a high-level summit on the Millennium Development Goals (**MDGs**).

The MDGs, a series of globally agreed social and economic targets with a 2015 deadline, include a number of health objectives, such as Goal 4 on reducing the mortality rate for children under the age of five by two thirds and Goal 5 on slashing maternal mortality rates by three quarters, both from their 1990 figures.

Today’s launch, which included the private sector, foundations, international organizations, civil society and research groups, represents a major step towards filling the gap between the investment needed and what is currently provided for women’s and children’s health – with over \$40 billion in resources committed over the next five years.

“We are teaming up to put women and children first backed by \$40 billion in resources and many ambitious pledges to do more for women’s and children’s health,” Mr. Ban **told reporters** after the launch. “These commitments will ensure more health for the money, and more money for health.”

The Global Strategy identifies the finance and policy changes needed, along with vital interventions to help improve health and save lives. It is expected to prevent, between 2011 and 2015, the deaths of more than 15 million children under five, as well as 33 million unwanted pregnancies and the deaths of 740,000 women from complications related to pregnancy and childbirth.

To help ensure that it is successful, several agencies, including the UN Children’s Fund (**UNICEF**), the UN Population Fund (**UNFPA**), the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (**UNAIDS**), the World Health Organization (**WHO**) and the **World Bank** are collaborating to mobilize ongoing political and operational support, including fighting for universal access to care for all women and children.

This team will identify and connect resources to the people who need them based on the priorities set by countries in their national health plans.

In addition, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunizations (GAVI) and the Global Fund to Fight HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria are working with this team to ensure integrated services and efforts across a range of health needs.

“The Global Strategy asks us to be smart, strategic and resourceful as never before,” said WHO Director-General Margaret Chan. “By integrating their actions, the eight international health-related agencies will strengthen capacities across the board, in ways that meet the comprehensive needs of women and children.”

Thoraya Ahmed Obaid, Executive Director of UNFPA, stressed the need to advance the health and rights of women worldwide. "Women deliver for their families, communities and nations. Now it is time to deliver for women!"

"To improve women's health and achieve the health-related MDGs, we need to address inequities, engage communities and scale up reproductive health services," she added.

This is especially true in Afghanistan, which still has the second highest maternal mortality ratio in the world after Sierra Leone, despite a reduction in the number of women dying from pregnancy and complications from childbirth over the past eight years.

Peter Crowley, UNICEF Representative in Afghanistan, highlighted the education of women and girls as one of the smartest investments the country can make to meet the health-related MDGs.

"Women who receive an education are less likely to die in childbirth and more likely to have healthy children. The under-five mortality rate falls by about half for mothers with primary education and the benefits increase with each additional year at school.

"Healthy, educated and empowered women raise healthy, educated and confident sons and daughters and it is children such as these that Afghanistan needs if it too is to thrive," he said.

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