

## World must recommit to slash maternal mortality as goal lags far behind – UN



A young mother breastfeeds her baby

27 October 2009 – The target of slashing maternal mortality and ensuring universal access to reproductive health is the furthest from success of all the Millennium Development Goals (**MDGs**) the world set itself in 2000, a senior United Nations official has warned, calling for renewed political will, funding and international solidarity.

“Women are dying because for too many years, women’s lives, dreams and rights have not been given the priority attention they deserve,” UN Population Fund (**UNFPA**) Executive Director Thoraya Ahmed Obaid yesterday told a high-level meeting in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on maternal health, the fifth of eight MDGs, slated for achievement by 2015.

“Maternal death and disability is one of the greatest moral, human rights and development challenges of our time. We are here in Addis to say that no woman should die giving life and no woman should die from unsafe abortion.”

An estimated 500,000 women globally die each year while giving birth, and Ms. Obaid called maternal mortality “the world’s largest health inequity” with the poor having the least access to needed services.

She laid out an action plan based on three points: life and death is a political decision; leadership and resources will determine success or failure; and solidarity and partnership are the only way forward.

“I say life and death is a political decision because we know what works and needs to be done. And with just five years remaining in the countdown to 2015, we need urgent action,” she stressed, calling for scaling up a comprehensive package of sexual and reproductive health information, supplies and services, including safe delivery with skilled attendance at birth and emergency obstetric care.

On resources, she noted that during this decade funding for reproductive health has remained at the same level while that for other health areas increased substantially. “Today, I call on governments, organizations and financial institutions, in the North and in the South, to recommit and invest in sexual and reproductive health, including family planning, as an urgent priority,” she said.

“It would cost the world \$23 billion per year to stop women from having unintended pregnancies and dying in childbirth, and to save millions of newborns. This amounts to less

than 10 days of global military spending. Instead, the world loses \$15 billion in productivity each year by allowing mothers and newborns to die.”

On solidarity and partnership, she noted that governments and partners agreed for the first time 15 years ago at the International Conference on Population and Development that everyone has the right to sexual and reproductive health.

“But as we all know, we have an unfinished agenda. We still have a long way to go and we need to go faster. And solidarity and partnership, maximizing our common ground and minimizing our differences, will propel us further ahead,” she stressed.

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