



United Nations Population Fund

## **UNFPA SCALES UP EFFORTS TO SAVE MILLIONS OF WOMEN**

***Aims to Raise Nearly \$500 Million to Reduce Maternal Deaths in 75 Countries***

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**UNITED NATIONS, New York, 14 February 2008** - A new thematic fund for maternal health has been created to boost global efforts to reduce the number of women dying in pregnancy and childbirth. The fund, established by UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, will also encourage developed countries and private sponsors to contribute more to saving women's lives.

Every minute a woman dies due to complications in pregnancy or childbirth, adding up to half a million women dying every year. Another 10-15 million women suffer serious or long-lasting illnesses or disabilities.

No woman should die giving life," said UNFPA Executive Director Thoraya Ahmed Obaid. "To have a healthy society, you have to have healthy mothers."

In many countries, however, progress in maternal health has been slow. In some, the situation has actually deteriorated over the last 20 years. The reason is insufficient political will and inadequate resources, as women's health is often pushed off the agenda in favour of other priorities.

"It is critical to invest in women if we are to achieve the Millennium Development Goals," said Ms. Obaid. "We urge countries to dedicate more resources to improving national health systems, training skilled birth attendants and promoting family planning. Millions of deaths and disabilities could be prevented, if every woman had access to reproductive health services."

Improving maternal health and reducing maternal deaths are at the heart of Millennium Development Goal number 5.

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The thematic fund, which UNFPA has established in partnership with governments, United Nations organizations and other international partners, will help countries increase their access and use of quality maternal health services that would reduce maternal deaths and disabilities. It will also increase the capacity of health systems to provide a broad range of quality maternal health services, strengthen mechanisms to reduce health inequities, and empower women to exercise their right to maternal health.

The thematic fund will focus on supporting 75 countries with the greatest need. The goal is to raise \$465 million during 2008-2011.

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UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, is an international development agency that promotes the right of every woman, man and child to enjoy a life of health and equal opportunity. UNFPA supports countries in using population data for policies and programmes to reduce poverty and to ensure that every pregnancy is wanted, every birth is safe, every young person is free of HIV/AIDS, and every girl and woman is treated with dignity and respect.

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