



UN MILLENNIUM CAMPAIGN CAUTIONS THAT MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS WILL NOT BE MET UNLESS AND UNTIL WOMEN'S RIGHTS, EMPOWERMENT AND DEVELOPMENT ARE ACHIEVED

On International Women's Day, Campaign calls on governments to take immediate action to curb maternal mortality and ensure girls and women have access to education, meaningful employment and political participation

March 6, 2009 –*"I have been campaigning on the issue of maternal mortality for quite some time now. But last week, it hit me directly: My sister, Asmau, age 33, died in Nigeria, two hours after delivering her second child, a boy who she never held. Asmau was not an illiterate woman. She was a senior science teacher, and her husband is a college principal."*

This experience of Dr. Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem, Deputy Director of the UN Millennium Campaign, sums up the sheer desperation and outrage experienced by many families who lose their loved ones needlessly during childbirth.

As International Women's Day – March 8, 2009 -- approaches, the United Nations Millennium Campaign is issuing initial findings of a status report which indicates that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) will not be realized unless and until women's empowerment, rights and development are achieved. The report -- which reviewed the status of the MDGs in 17 African countries with a focus on gender equality, women's empowerment and maternal health and will be released next month – finds that societies in which women's equality is paramount are more likely to achieve the MDGs by 2015. Addressing inequalities based on gender greatly reduces poverty and increases levels of well-being for the entire population.

While the report focuses on Africa, the issues of equality for women, maternal health and education are pressing in many Asian countries as well. India, for example, has the highest number of maternal deaths in the world.

"Maternal mortality is one of the most blatant and unconscionable human rights violations of our time," said Salil Shetty, Director of the UN Millennium Campaign. "In today's world, more than 500,000 women still die annually in pregnancy and childbirth. The vast majority of these deaths are preventable. On International Women's Day, we are calling on all governments in developing countries to take immediate and drastic action to reduce maternal mortality and to ensure that girls and women have access to education at all levels, are gainfully employed, and enjoy full political rights as both voters and decision makers."

"Our governments must take the bull by the horns and develop concrete action plans

aimed at drastically reducing the numbers of women dying during childbirth," said Monica Omollo, a women's rights campaigner based in Kenya. "Our leaders must realize that that by allowing women to die needlessly while giving life they are grossly violating their human rights."

The UN Millennium Campaign is therefore calling on governments in developing countries to increase political commitment to achieving the MDGs and:

- Provide a constitutional framework, including policy and legal provisions, which protects women's economic, social and cultural rights.
- Reduce maternal mortality through national action plans that prioritize safe pregnancy and delivery as fundamental human rights.
- Ensure special attention to marginalized groups in health policies and programs.
- Guarantee the meaningful participation of women and local communities in the design, development, implementation and monitoring of initiatives to combat maternal deaths.
- Rapidly increase access to skilled birth attendants and health workers for emergency obstetric care and comprehensive reproductive health services.
- Promote access to education and reproductive health services.
- Foster the direct involvement of local communities in their health systems.
- Develop monitoring and accountability mechanisms to improve existing initiatives to combat maternal mortality, including health audits.

The Campaign is also calling on governments of developed countries to meet their commitments to provide 0.7% of their national incomes as foreign aid for the realization of the MDGs – financing that is essential to prevent the loss of more mothers during childbirth.

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Note to editors:

The UN Millennium Campaign was established by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan in 2002. The Campaign supports citizens' efforts to hold their governments to account for

the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. The Millennium Development Goals were adopted by 189 world leaders from the north and south, as part of the Millennium Declaration which was signed in 2000. These leaders agreed to achieve the Goals by 2015. Our premise is simple: we are the first generation that can end poverty and we refuse to miss this opportunity.