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THE SOCIETY OF OBSTETRICIANS AND GYNAECOLOGISTS OF CANADA

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Canada's Obstetricians and Gynaecologists Commend the Prime Minister

Ottawa (Jan 28, 2010) – The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada (SOGC) commends Prime Minister Stephen Harper for his announcement this week that Canada will champion a major initiative to improve the health of women and children in the world's poorest regions.

"The government's commitment this week to put mothers and children front and centre will accelerate our efforts to truly address the continuing reality that more than 500,000 women annually, and 10 million women over a generation, die due to complications related to pregnancy and childbirth," said Dr. André Lalonde, Executive Vice-President of the SOGC and a Board Member of the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (PMNCH).

The SOGC works with international partners in countries like Haiti, Uganda, Guatemala, and many more, to build the capacity of health workers, and to strengthen their skills in Emergency Obstetric Care, so they can respond to complications during pregnancy, childbirth and post-birth.

"We do this because we know that that 80% of maternal deaths occur at the time of birth, and those deaths are preventable," says Dr. Lalonde. "Take post partum hemorrhage, for example; it is the principal cause of maternal mortality, accounting for up to 70% of maternal deaths in some countries, and it can be easily prevented by ensuring the immediate provision of low-cost medications to women when they deliver."

In the past few years, the SOGC has been actively seeking the support of parliamentarians by presenting the topic of maternal and child health at parliamentary sessions, as well as before the Standing Committee on Finance (in September 2006). "An event on Parliament Hill in November 2008, entitled 'Wake Up Call for Safe Motherhood' initiated the SOGC's advocacy efforts leading up to the 2010 G8," says Dr. Lalonde. Two succeeding parliamentary sessions, one organized collaboratively with the Canadian Association of Midwives in June 2009 and one organized collaboratively with PMNCH in December 2009, resulted in having resolutions put forward to the House of Commons immediately following the meetings. The enthusiasm and support of many Members of Parliament and Senators to address the issue of maternal health has been influential in advancing progress and commitment from Canada's government.

"We know now that the Government of Canada heard our voices," says Dr. Lalonde, "and we believe that Canada is in an ideal position to take the lead in defending and promoting every woman's right to survive pregnancy and childbirth."

As Prime Minister Harper pointed out, the solutions are not intrinsically expensive.

