



Maternal and Child Health a Priority at the 2010 G8 Summit

Media Backgrounder, January 2010

“The United Nations had hoped to reduce the number of deaths related to pregnancy by 75 per cent by 2015 as part of its Millennium Development Goals. It now appears this target will go unfulfilled.”

- Prime Minister Stephen Harper, Jan. 26, 2010

What's Going On?

In the developed world, the arrival of a new baby is most often an occasion for celebration, a happy milestone for growing families. But elsewhere in the world, women literally risk their lives to give birth, and many newborns die within minutes or days. Many of the children who are lucky enough to survive their early days will not celebrate their fifth birthday. Recent reports estimate that each year, more than nine million children die before they reach five years of age; 536,000 women die from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth. Many of these deaths could be prevented through affordable, known solutions such as simple medical procedures (such as ability to carry out a c-section in case of obstructed labour), medications and well-trained planned health care support.

The social and economic impact of this continuing tragedy costs the world in terms of its economic productivity and its very humanity. USAID estimates that global economic impact of maternal and newborn mortality alone is US \$15 billion in lost potential production each year. Maternal and child mortality and morbidity rates are highest among the poorest countries and communities. It is also an issue of equity and human rights. The Human Rights Council adopted last June a landmark resolution on ‘Preventable maternal mortality and morbidity and human rights’ in which governments express grave concern for the unacceptably high rates of maternal mortality and morbidity¹, and commit to enhance their efforts at the national and international level to protect the lives of women and girls worldwide.

¹ http://www.who.int/pmnch/topics/maternal/20090617_humanrightsresolution/en/

The **specific needs of mothers**, particularly those in poor developing countries, are situated in the broader MNCH agenda. The International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics (FIGO) highlights that there is a need for strong efforts to promote safe motherhood and the improvement of maternal health within the efforts for improved continuum of care. Lack of attention to these issues result in the unacceptable burden of maternal deaths and disability caused by lack of quality care. FIGO estimates that there are approximately two million women who suffer from obstetric fistula around the world, with more added every day. This horrific condition, which causes internal tearing during labour or birth, incontinence, pain and usually social ostracization, is easily treated in the western world through surgical intervention.

Post partum hemorrhage represents the principal cause of maternal mortality and accounts for up to 70% of maternal deaths in some countries. These deaths could be averted by providing low-cost medications in local, regional, district and national health clinics. For even as low as 15 cents per woman, sound interventions could be used to prevent women from dying while giving life.

Canada's Story

Over the past decades, many of today's developed countries had very high maternal and child mortality rates. Canada's historical decline of maternal mortality is a success story that can be shared with countries that are struggling today with these very same issues. Over the period 1938-1953, the Canadian maternal mortality rate fell 82%. The role of Canada's government in improving the quality of care in facilities and increasing effective coverage of delivery care equitably is an example that can be useful to other countries that find themselves with a high maternal mortality burden today.

Today, the Canadian government, Canadian health agencies and not-for-profits are actively engaged both at home and around the world. Many Canadian physicians, health care professionals and public policy advocates, for example, have assumed leadership roles in the international groups that are tackling MNCH issues.

Canada is the 4th largest donor for MNCH overall among the 22 OECD donor countries. However, the disaggregated data by area of investment (maternal and newborn versus child) during the same period, shows that the spending is mostly occurring on child health. In fact, Canada sits only at 11th position out of 12 in terms of the proportion of MNCH aid given to maternal and newborn vs child.

SOGC welcomes the opportunity to work with the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the Canadian government to address maternal health in low-resource countries. Starting with CIDA's priority countries, a strong initial action would be to implement emergency obstetrical care and ensure the availability of delivery kits for safe childbirth in health clinics at all levels (local, regional, national).

The SOGC, through its members, nurses, midwives and doctors, has the necessary expertise to make great progress for improving women's health around the world, but what is most needed is increased funding directed at programs for safe motherhood, as well as strong political commitment.

“That this House renews its commitment to reducing maternal and newborn morbidity and mortality both at home and abroad and supports Canadian leadership within government and civil society to work within the G8 and as partners with UN agencies and appropriate global initiatives to achieve this goal.”- All Party Resolution unanimously passed in the House of Commons, June 2, 2009.

About the SOGC

The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada (SOGC) is one of Canada's oldest national specialty organizations. Established in 1944, the Society's mission is to promote excellence in the practice of obstetrics and gynaecology and to advance the health of women through leadership, advocacy, collaboration, outreach and education. The SOGC represents obstetricians/gynaecologists, family physicians, nurses, midwives and allied health professionals working in the field of sexual reproductive health.

For over ten years now, the SOGC has also been participating in global efforts to improve quality care to women in resource-constraint countries around the world. The International Women's Health Program of the SOGC provides training to health care professionals, and support to professional associations as well as to other institutions of the health care sector, to ensure that every woman has the right to survive pregnancy and childbirth and has access to the care she needs to deliver a healthy baby.

For more information, visit www.sogc.org and <http://iwhp.sogc.org>

**For more information about maternal, newborn and child health initiatives
visit the following web sites:**

Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada (SOGC)
www.sogc.org / <http://iwhp.sogc.org>

Partnership for Maternal, Newborn & Child Health (PMNCH)
www.pmnch.org

Countdown to 2015 for Maternal, Newborn & Child Survival
<http://www.countdown2015mnch.org>

Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics (FIGO)
<http://www.figo.org>

Birth Atlas video:
<http://www.youtube.com/whiteribbonalliance#p/a/1/v1InwsiGS0>

Additional Resources:

The Toronto Star: G8 agenda: Focus on human welfare, January 26th 2010
Prime Minister Stephen Harper
<http://www.thestar.com/opinion/article/755721>

La Presse: La santé maternelle et infantile, priorités du Canada, January 26th 2010
Prime Minister Stephen Harper
<http://www.cyberpresse.ca/le-droit/opinions/votre-opinion/201001/26/01-943017-la-sante-maternelle-et-infantile-priorites-du-canada.php>

Message from Prime Minister Stephen Harper
<http://www.pm.gc.ca/eng/media.asp?id=3093>

PMNCH and SOGC Special Event December 2nd 2009
http://iwhp.sogc.org/index.php?mact=News,cntnt01,detail,0&cntnt01articleid=340&cntnt01origid=70&cntnt01detailtemplate=events-detail-template&cntnt01returnid=82&hl=en_US

PMNCH and SOGC Parliamentary Session on December 3rd 2009
http://iwhp.sogc.org/index.php?mact=News,cntnt01,detail,0&cntnt01articleid=341&cntnt01detailtemplate=news-detail-template&cntnt01returnid=268&hl=en_US

Media Contacts:

Christine Butt	613-730-4192 ext 236
Natalie Wright	613-730-4192 ext 366