

**June 20, 2007 - Media Advisory**

*SOGC Annual Clinical Meeting, Ottawa, June 21 to 26, 2007*

## **Canadian and International Health Professionals meet to discuss why half a million mothers still dying each year**

**WHAT: The 2007 International Women's Health Symposium**

**WHEN: Thursday, June 21, 2007 | 08:00-17:00**

**WHERE: The Westin Ottawa – Confederation Ballroom  
11 Colonel By Drive  
Ottawa, ON  
K1N 9H4**

**Ottawa** – Hundreds of Canadian and International ob/gyns, health professionals, world health leaders, and NGO representatives will meet tomorrow in Ottawa to discuss why twenty years of global efforts have not been able to reduce the number of mothers and newborns dying needlessly during childbirth.

Exactly 20 years have passed since the world's top global health and development organizations vowed to cut by half the number of women and infants dying needlessly during childbirth. Today, the numbers remain unchanged – in 2007 alone, a half-million women will die during childbirth, almost all of these deaths are preventable. In some parts of the world there have been improvements but for each of these gains there have been losses and in some cases, increases in maternal deaths with 90% of these deaths taking place in the developing world.

“Certainly, progress has been made in many areas,” said Dr. Dorothy Shaw, President of the International Federation of Obstetrics and Gynaecology. “But it is a humbling experience that on the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of these goals, we still have a half-million women dying every year.”

Tomorrow, health experts will be meeting in Ottawa for the International Women's Health Symposium, in conjunction with the 63<sup>rd</sup> Annual Meeting of the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada (SOGC). The symposium will examine the progress and failures of the past 20 years since the global

health community set goals for itself at a pivotal meeting in Kenya. In 1987, the World Bank, World Health Organization, and the United Nations Fund for Population Activities brought together political and health leaders from around the world for a landmark conference in Nairobi. The purpose of the conference was to develop a plan to save mothers around the world, with the goal of reducing the number of women who die during childbirth by 50 percent, in the year 2000.

In Ottawa, symposium participants will review progress, especially in countries such as Africa, and look at the roles of professional associations like the SOGC in championing for change and offering assistance.

“It’s all too easy to look at the numbers of women dying and say, ‘this problem is just too big’,” said Dr. André Lalonde, Executive Vice-President of the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada (SOGC). “But there is no mystery about how to prevent these deaths. We know what works, but we need the partnerships and global commitment to bring about sustained change.”

For its part, the SOGC and its members have been engaged in significant ways for many years in international efforts to improve maternal and child health. Since 1999, the SOGC has undertaken medical training and capacity building interventions around the world, aimed at reducing the number of women in low-resource countries who die during childbirth. In May, for example, the Society initiated the new Quarité project, a nearly \$5-million, four-year initiative to train health care professionals in Senegal and Mali. In collaboration with the University of Montreal, SOGC will offer medical training in emergency obstetrical care, aimed at addressing the most common causes of death during childbirth. The Quarité project, which is funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, will also include a large evaluation component to measure the program’s success at addressing the tragedy of maternal mortality, measured against a control group of hospitals in the region. The program will focus on offering training within a framework stressing the importance of women’s sexual and reproductive health rights.

Some of Canada’s, and the world’s, experts and advocates for improved birthing conditions around the world will be available to media at this important global event.

**Members of the media are invited to attend this symposium:**

### **Symposium Highlights**

**08:15:**

- **Safe Motherhood Initiatives: 20 Years and Counting**  
Ann Starrs, MD | Executive Vice-President, Family Care International

**15:15:**

- **Mobilizing Political Will for Safe Motherhood in Uganda**  
Sylvia Ssinabulya | Member of Parliament, Kampala, Uganda
- &
- **Why do some Global Health Initiatives Succeed and others Fail? Lessons from the Case of Safe Motherhood**  
Jeremy Shiffman, PhD, Syracuse, NY

The complete symposium schedule is available online at:  
[http://www.sogc.org/acm2007/english/sci\\_21\\_e.aspx](http://www.sogc.org/acm2007/english/sci_21_e.aspx)

**For More Information:**

**For more information, or to schedule interviews on these or other topics related to women's health, members of the media are invited to contact:**

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(613) 739-7032

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### **About the International Women's Health Program**

Every minute around the world, one woman dies during labour or childbirth.

The International Women's Health Program is an initiative of the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada (SOGC). Since 1999, the program has conducted medical training and capacity building interventions around the world, involving the participation of volunteering Canadian doctors, nurses, midwives and other health professionals.

The main focus of these interventions is to strengthen the capacity of health care centres and professionals in emergency obstetrical care as well as support the strengthening of professional associations. The International Women's Health Program aims to promote safe pregnancy and childbirth worldwide through the development of partnerships to help ameliorate safe motherhood and newborn health, and through programs such as ALARM International, a mobilizing training tool for healthcare professional that address the main causes of maternal and newborn mortality.

The ALARM International Program has been delivered in 17 countries, and is planned in five more, including: Benin, Congo, Ethiopia, Gabon, Guatemala, Haiti, India, Indonesia, Kosovo, Mali, Mexico, The Phillippines, Uganda, Ukraine, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Yemen. Through its partnership program, SOGC is supporting the societies of obstetricians and gynaecologists in Uganda, Ukraine, Guatemala, Haiti, Kosovo and Burkina Faso to increase their organizational capacities so that they can assume leadership in the field of maternal and neonatal health.