

## Press Release

### **UNICEF asks to Prioritize the Prevention of Neonatal Mortality**

On a global scale, the reduction in deaths of newborn babies has stagnated

**JOHANNESBURG/LIMA, 1 July 2014** – At the conclusion of a global forum here focused on preventing maternal, child and newborn deaths, UNICEF said the commitments made by governments and public and private sector organizations have the potential to transform the outlook for newborn babies, millions of whom die each year.

Figures from UNICEF show 2.9 million babies die in the first month of life. Of these, 1 million do not survive the first day, making the first 24 hours of a child's life the most dangerous. As deaths of children under five have decreased globally, from approximately 12 million in 1990 to 6.6 million in 2012, newborn deaths have stagnated and now make up a larger percentage of child deaths than they did in 1990, going from 33 per cent to 44 per cent.

The *Every Newborn Action Plan* launched at the Johannesburg forum by former South Africa First Lady and women and children's advocate Graça Machel, aims to address this glaring lapse in the global child survival agenda.

"I am very optimistic that progress can be made, because it has been done by some countries," said Dr Mickey Chopra, head of UNICEF's global health programmes. "Over the past decade, Rwanda, for example, has had the fastest rate of reduction of child mortality in sub-Saharan Africa. If we used the same methods globally, by 2035 a child born in Cameroon would have about the same chance of surviving as a child born in the United States."

The *Every Newborn Action Plan* was developed by UNICEF and the World Health Organization and provides a clear roadmap on how to end preventable newborn deaths. It promotes innovative ways to strengthen health sector strategies, and outlines standards for quality care, and measurement of births and deaths. It also includes programmes to reach those most neglected with universally available health care, and sets guidelines for accountability.

UNICEF says the measures being promoted in the *Every Newborn Action Plan* can prevent over 70 per cent of deaths happening now. The key is to get the political commitment; and this is what the launch and the Forum seek to generate.

In the last few weeks, commitments have been made by governments, civil society organizations and the private sector to support newborn programmes. These include pledges of support to newborn health worth almost half a billion dollars from the USA, Canada, the Islamic Development Bank, Johnson & Johnson, GSMA, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and others.

"Countries must take the lead in making sure these proven, simple steps to help newborn survival are implemented at the local level," added Dr Kim Eva Dickson, UNICEF's senior adviser on maternal and neonatal health. "This would ensure that all mothers and babies, even those in the hardest to reach communities can get the quality care they need to help them survive."

Essential to action is ensuring that children, especially the smallest, are counted by their governments. The almost 3 million newborns who die, and an additional 2.6 million who are

stillborn, are largely absent from their countries' statistics. Neither their births nor their deaths are registered, and so there is little accountability for their lives, and little attention paid to why they are dying.

"As we mark the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the Convention of the Rights of the Child this year, we still have much to do to ensure that even the smallest child has that most basic right: to survive," said Dr Chopra. "We hope this is just the start of an unstoppable momentum towards ending preventable newborn deaths within a generation."

**Source:** [http://www.unicef.org/media/media\\_73972.html](http://www.unicef.org/media/media_73972.html)

### **Progress in Peru**

In Peru, Dr. Mario Tavera, UNICEF Health Specialist, said that between 1992 and 2014, the country had managed to reduce the infant mortality rate from 57 to 16 per thousand live births. He noted that these progresses are the result of the strengthening of health services, the universal access to insurance, and evidence-based interventions such as the promotion of prenatal care; institutional delivery; timely cutting of the umbilical cord; and initiating breastfeeding within the first hour of life, as well as the practice of exclusive breastfeeding during the first months of life and the reduction of chronic child malnutrition.

Dr. Tavera mentioned the need to pay special attention to the death of newborns because, according to him, the two-thirds of deaths before the age of one year old occurred within the first month of life. The specialist from UNICEF reiterated that according to the study "Neonatal Mortality in Peru and its departments 2011-2012" from the Department of Epidemiology of the Ministry of Health (MoH), 15 097 neonatal deaths occurred in that period. He specified that 21% of these deaths were the consequence of an infection and that 37% happened to babies weighting more than 2500 grammes at birth. This suggests that a high percentage of neonatal births are preventable.

Therefore, the increase in the budget assigned to the Neonatal and Maternal Health Strategic Programme has been identified as a successful measure to strengthen the attention towards mothers and newborns in health care services and to promote new interventions such as the home monitoring of newborns at risk in all the regions of the country. "The agenda on neonatal mortality has to remain a priority", he finally said.

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