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ACTION URGED OVER CHILDBIRTH DEATHS

Saturday July 5, 2008

Leading women including Gwyneth Paltrow, Yoko Ono and Dame Judi Dench are urging the wives of world leaders to take action to stop mothers dying during childbirth.

In an open email to the "First Ladies" of the G8 leaders - and the husband of German Chancellor Angela Merkel - they say 500,000 women die each year giving birth.

The message was published as an advertisement in The Times by the White Ribbon Alliance, a charity campaigning to reduce maternal mortality across the globe.

Thirty women from across business, science, journalism and entertainment put their names to the email, as G8 leaders prepare for a summit in Japan starting on Monday.

It says 80% of the deaths are avoidable, declaring: "The person with whom you live can help stop this happening.

"Please do what you can to put this issue at the top of the political agenda. We now have the knowledge to crack it, we just need the political will."

Set up in 1999, the alliance brings together individuals, aid agencies and medical staff to raise awareness and lobby for increased funding.

Among those who signed the email are singer Annie Lennox, actress Emma Thompson, French astronaut Claudie Haignere, and supermodel Claudia Schiffer and former President of Ireland Mary Robinson.

They already have allies in Prime Minister Gordon Brown's wife Sarah and Carla Bruni Sarkozy, wife of French President Nicolas Sarkozy. The pair united in March to host a lunch for the charity, of which Mrs Brown is a patron.

She told the audience maternal mortality was an issue that was too often kept "shamefully silent" and called on people in power to work together to ensure tackling the problem did not become the "forgotten Millennium goal".



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