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Act now or miss mother and child survival targets, international leaders say

25 September 2008 - New York - Global targets to cut the deaths of mothers, newborns, and children will be missed without urgent action, international leaders said today.

Speaking in New York at the UN Summit on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the presidents of Chile, Finland and Tanzania committed their countries to action to meet MDGs 4 and 5, on child and maternal health.

They warned that without concerted global action these critical goals will be missed. At the current rate of progress MDG 4, which aims to cut child mortality by two thirds by 2015, will only be met by 2045. MDG 5, which aims to reduce maternal mortality by 75% by 2015, has made the least progress of all the development goals and is the least likely to be achieved.

The warning came at a special event, "Commitment to Progress for Mothers, Newborns and Children" co-hosted by Chile, Finland and the United Republic of Tanzania. The event was attended by representatives of more than 100 governments and international organizations, many of them bringing pledges to support action for MDGs 4 and 5.

"Today as leaders in our respective fields we recognize that only with renewed commitment and collaborative efforts can we accelerate progress towards Millennium Development Goals 4 and 5. We now know it can be done and that maternal, newborn and child health are at the heart of all the MDGs. The first step is political will and partnership. Today we commit to this task and call on all those concerned about the health of women and children to join us."

President Michelle Bachelet of Chile, President Tarja Halonen of Finland, President Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete of the United Republic of Tanzania

Clear pledges

At the event, Vice President Gabriel Ntizezerna of Burundi pledged to extend free healthcare to all pregnant women. The UK Secretary of State for International Development Douglas Alexander pledged to spend an estimated £450 million over the next three years to support national health plans for 8 International Health Partnership countries, including Ethiopia, Mozambique, Burundi and Nepal. The International NGO World Vision announced that it is investing approximately US\$150 million in cash to address child health and an additional US\$300 million in in-kind contributions for medications, medical equipment, and supplies.

These new pledges will enhance the impact of existing contributions from committed stakeholders such as the Government of Norway which has pledged US\$1 billion over ten years to reduce child and maternal mortality on top of US\$1 billion already pledged between 2000 and 2015 for vaccinating children in developing countries.

The event was hailed by international organizations as a landmark on the road to meeting MDGs 4 and 5. "Action and investment by national, regional and international leaders are the

defining factors to reach MDGs 4 and 5. Making an additional investment of US\$10.2 billion annually will save not only 6 million mothers and children, but it will bring sound economic and social benefits to families and societies to overcome persisting poverty. This is the time for action – these resources need to be made available now if we are to have any hope of meeting the targets by 2015,” according to the co-organizing institutions.

*Family Care International; International Planned Parenthood Federation;
Save the Children UK; the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn & Child Health;
White Ribbon Alliance; World Vision International*

Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg of Norway closed the event with a call to global leaders to accelerate progress towards MDGs 4 and 5 through increased investment in quality health services for mothers, newborns, and children and the health systems and workers that support them.

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