

Leaders Discuss Priority Health Commodities that Save Women's and Children's Lives

Select commissioners start the work of the new UN Commission on Life-saving Commodities for Women and Children.

New York, 17 April 2012 – Representatives from the United Nations, the private sector, governments, philanthropy, academia and civil society met today for the first time under the *United Nations Commission on Life-Saving Commodities for Women and Children*. The Commission, co-chaired by President Goodluck Jonathan of Nigeria and Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg of Norway, is tasked with promoting consensus around affordable and effective medicines and health supplies that currently do not reach the women and children who most need them.

The commissioners joined the meeting from various remote locations to discuss ways to synthesize existing knowledge about priority life-saving health supplies, which will inform high-level recommendations that will be announced later this year.

An estimated 1,000 women die every day due to complications during pregnancy and childbirth. Many of these deaths could be prevented or treated if all women had access to simple and affordable health supplies, including medicines and contraceptives. In a recent survey in 31 countries, [oxytocin](#)—a medicine to prevent bleeding after childbirth—was regularly available in 74 per cent of all health facilities, and magnesium sulfate—a medicine to treat eclampsia—was available in only 52 per cent of health facilities.

An estimated 1.36 million children die each year due to pneumonia alone. Antibiotics, such as [amoxicillin](#), can prevent the majority of pneumonia deaths and cost less than \$0.50 per treatment course.

Despite the existence of this simple, inexpensive treatment, only 30 per cent of children with suspected pneumonia receive an antibiotic. The UN Commission on Life-Saving Commodities provides a platform to help overcome major bottlenecks, such as scaling up integrated community case management programmes to effectively identify and treat cases like these.

Some 215 million women in the developing world want family planning but cannot get it. An estimated 10 billion condoms are needed every year. In 2010, only 2.8 billion male condoms and 18 million [female condoms](#) were provided by the donor community, mostly to sub-Saharan Africa, where one female condom was distributed for every 13 women of reproductive age and nine male condoms were available for men of reproductive age. The unmet need for contraception results in 82 per cent of all unintended pregnancies in the world, increasing the maternal death risk.

The Commission has requested working groups to take up three main areas of inquiry: market shaping, regulatory environment, and best practices and innovation. The market shaping work stream will identify strategies to promote optimal supply. The regulatory environment group will identify essential areas to ensure that medicines are available in the marketplace. The best practices and innovation work stream will build on previous recommendations made by the UN on information and accountability, focusing on innovative technologies, strategies to create demand and ways to scale up

access to the vital health supplies championed by the Commission.

Giving birth without any trained help puts the woman at risk, as she will almost certainly not have access to the care and life-saving medicines necessary if birth-related complications set in. During the period 2000-2008, according to the World Health Organization, less than 50 per cent of women in African and South-East Asia regions gave birth with the assistance of a trained healthcare worker.

The next meeting of the Commission will be held in New York on 22 May, when Commissioners will adopt recommendations for action.

The Commission, which was created by the UN Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, under the auspices of the *Every Woman Every Child* movement, seeks to amplify efforts to save and improve the lives of 16 million women and children by 2015.

- See more at: <http://www.everywomaneverychild.org/component/content/article/10-media/322-leaders-discuss-priority-health-commodities-that-save-womens-and-childrens-lives#sthash.YEhmwyvM.dpuf>