

UN Launches Commission on Life-Saving Commodities for Women and Children

NEW YORK, 23 March 2012 – UNICEF and UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, today launched a high-level commission to improve access to essential but overlooked health supplies that could save the lives of millions of women and children every year.

“Making sure that women and children have the medicines and other supplies they need is critical for our push to achieve the MDGs,” said Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. “The Commission will tackle an overlooked but vital aspect of health systems, and ensure that women and children are protected from preventable causes of death and disease.”

President Goodluck Jonathan of Nigeria and Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg of Norway will serve as founding co-chairs of the Commission on Life-saving Commodities for Women and Children, which will also include global stakeholders from the public, private and civil society sectors. UNICEF Executive Director Anthony Lake and UNFPA Executive Director Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin are vice-chairs of the Commission, which is part of the United Nations Secretary-General’s Every Woman Every Child movement to support achievement of the health-related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

“I am honoured to serve as the Co-Chair of this critical UN Commission because I recognize that the health of women and children is at the heart of all well-being and development in our society,” said President Jonathan of Nigeria. “There is no doubt that lives can be saved by increasing access to affordable and effective medicines and health supplies. We must all make a difference and the time is now.”

“The day of birth is the most dangerous day in the life of a woman and her child,” said Prime Minister Stoltenberg. “The fact that women do not get the care they need during childbirth is the most brutal expression of discrimination against women. To prevent these tragic and unnecessary deaths is not only a humanitarian urgency of highest priority, but a key investment for social and economic development.”

The Commission will identify strategies for improving the delivery of essential health supplies, including strengthening local production capacities, promoting new technologies and products, strengthening regulatory frameworks, and enhancing innovative financing mechanisms at both the global and local levels.

Research shows that increasing coverage of proven, inexpensive interventions, such as antibiotics for pneumonia and oral rehydration solution and zinc for diarrhoea, can reduce childhood deaths from these two most common illnesses by more than 70 per cent. Similarly, obstetric bleeding, the leading cause of maternal death around the world, results in an estimated 127,000 deaths annually, many of which could be prevented with life-saving medicines. Further, recent experience with vaccines, HIV/AIDS medicines and malaria programmes shows that it is possible to reduce the obstacles that result in under-utilization of health supplies, even in the most disadvantaged communities.

Availability, accessibility and affordability of contraceptives for family planning and other life-saving health supplies is also an essential part of well-functioning health systems that are able to serve people in an equitable manner. Some 215 million women currently have an unmet need for family planning in developing countries. Meeting this unmet need would result in 53 million less unintended pregnancies and approximately 100,000 less maternal deaths every year.

The Commission will focus on high-impact health supplies that can reduce the main causes of child and maternal deaths, as well as innovations that can be scaled up, including mechanisms for price reduction and supplies stability.

The Commission will pursue the following outcomes:

- Reducing financial barriers to access through social protection mechanisms, such as fee waivers, vouchers and social insurance, and global financial mechanisms, such as pooled procurement;
- Creating incentives for international and local manufacturers to produce and innovatively package overlooked supplies;
- Identifying fast-track regulatory activities to accelerate registration and reduce registration fees for a special list of products to encourage a focus on quality medicines.

The Commission will advocate at the highest levels to build consensus around priority actions for increasing the availability, affordability, access and rational use of overlooked health supplies that will prevent premature death and disease among children under five years old and women of childbearing age.

For more information on the Commission, visit www.everywomaneverychild.org/resources/un-commission-on-life-saving-commodities

About Every Woman Every Child

Launched by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon during the United Nations Millennium Development Goals Summit in September 2010, *Every Woman Every Child* aims to save the lives of 16 million women and children by 2015. It is an unprecedented global movement that mobilizes and intensifies international and national action by governments, multilaterals, the private sector and civil society to address the major health challenges facing women and children around the world. *Every Woman Every Child* puts into action the *Global Strategy for Women's and Children's Health*, which presents a roadmap on how to enhance financing, strengthen policy and improve service on the ground for the most vulnerable women and children. For more information visit www.everywomaneverychild.org

About UNICEF

UNICEF works in 190 countries and territories to help children survive and thrive, from early childhood through adolescence. The world's largest provider of vaccines for developing countries, UNICEF supports child health and nutrition, good water and sanitation, quality basic education for all boys and girls, and the protection of children from violence, exploitation, and AIDS. UNICEF is funded entirely by the voluntary contributions of individuals, businesses, foundations and governments. For more information about UNICEF and its work visit: www.unicef.org

About UNFPA

UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, is an international development agency that promotes the right of every woman, man and child to enjoy a life of health and equal opportunity. UNFPA supports countries in using population data for policies and programmes to reduce poverty and to ensure that every pregnancy is wanted, every birth is safe, every young person is free of HIV/AIDS,

and every girl and woman is treated with dignity and respect. For more information about UNFPA and its work visit: www.unfpa.org

For more information contact:

Christian Moen, Communication Specialist, UNICEF, tel: + 1 212 326 7516, cmoen@unicef.org

Etienne Franca, Media Specialist, UNFPA, tel: +1 212 297 5208, franca@unfpa.org

- See more at: <http://www.everywomaneverychild.org/component/content/article/10-media/290-un-launches-commission-on-life-saving-commodities-for-women-and-children#sthash.UNtwXLFK.dpuf>