

WE MUST END MATERNAL DEATH, SAYS UNFPA GOODWILL AMBASSADOR, GERI HALLIWELL

UNFPA Goodwill Ambassador and Spice Girl, Geri Halliwell, went to Zambia in November 2006 to support UNFPA and Government work to improve maternal health in the country and to see some of the conditions in which Zambian women give birth.

At a press conference upon her arrival, Ms. Halliwell said that maternal health should be made a higher priority, as many women, who travel long distances to seek help in health centres, are subjected to delays in seeing doctors. She called upon the international community, especially developed countries, to support the availability of midwives, doctors and ambulances to improve women's health in a country that has high numbers of maternal deaths due to lack of services provided during childbirth.



Geri Halliwell at the Women Deliver Conference, London, October 2007.

"There is also need for access to education for young girls on the facts of life and to empower women to take care of their lives," she said. "These may seem like big ideas, but even just a little awareness of something simple goes a long way."

Currently more than half a million women die in pregnancy and about 20 per cent of children will not reach the age of five globally, Ms. Halliwell said. She added, it was tragic that, even in the 21st century, women are still bleeding to death, especially when most of these deaths could be prevented.

On a more hopeful note, Ms. Halliwell said that many countries could apply lessons from nations, such as Cuba, Egypt, Sri Lanka and Tunisia, which offered examples of how to reduce maternal deaths.

Ms. Halliwell visited projects supported by the Zambian Government or UNFPA to reduce maternal deaths and illnesses. She visited rural and urban health facilities around Lusaka and the North-Western Province to meet with women benefiting from UNFPA-supported projects to improve maternal health.

During the mission, UNFPA donated lifesaving equipment to Lusaka's University Teaching Hospital. The donation was presented by UNFPA Representative Deji Popoola to the Minister of Health. The Minister said that it was sad that maternal death rates were unacceptably high even though they could be prevented.



UNFPA Goodwill Ambassador, Geri Halliwell, greets frontline fighters in the war against maternal death: nurses and midwives at the University of Zambia Teaching Hospital, Lusaka. November 2006.

UNFPA's Representative, Mr. Popoola, said motherhood in poor parts of the world was often tragic because of the huge cost that followed it. "The cost of having a baby in Africa is so huge that sometimes, we end up losing both the mother and the baby if adequate care is not taken," added Mr. Popoola.

Mr. Popoola stressed the need for concentrated efforts to ensure the availability of skilled workers in order

to reverse the trend of high levels of maternal death in Zambia.

On a visit to Mumena, in North-West Zambia, Mr. Popoola announced the renewal of the safe motherhood programme in Zambia for some more years. Ms. Halliwell and the UNFPA delegation visited projects to promote safe motherhood in the province.

Ms. Halliwell pledged to help raise awareness on the need to prevent death among pregnant women in Zambia and other developing countries. She has repeated her appeals to support maternal health in high-powered conferences, such as Women Deliver, and in the United States Congress.