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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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MESSAGE ON WORLD POPULATION DAY

11 July 2008

Forty years ago, world leaders proclaimed that individuals have a basic right to determine freely and responsibly the number and timing of their children. Millennium Development Goal 5, improving maternal health, affirms this right and yet shows the least progress to date. On World Population Day, let us focus on the critical importance of family planning if we are to successfully achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

The rate of death for women as they give birth remains the starkest indicator of the disparity between rich and poor, both within and among countries. We already know what needs to be done to meet the basic health needs of women throughout their life cycle, especially during the reproductive years, pregnancy and childbirth. There are three basic interventions necessary to improve maternal health: skilled attendance at the time of birth, facilities to provide emergency obstetric care and family planning.

Family planning is a fundamental component of reproductive health as it allows for determining the spacing of pregnancies. Studies show that family planning has immediate benefits for the lives and health of mothers and their infants. Ensuring basic access to family planning could reduce maternal deaths by a third and child deaths by as much as 20 per cent.

And yet the benefits of family planning remain out of reach for many, especially for those who often have the hardest time getting the information and services they need to plan their families, such as the poor, marginalized populations and young people. Demand will only increase, as more than one billion people ages 15-24 enter their reproductive years.

I call on Governments to honour the commitments made at the International Conference on Population and Development. At the Cairo Conference, nations agreed that all couples and individuals have the basic human right to not only decide freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children, but also to have the information, education and means to do so.

As we intensify our efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, let us take action to reduce maternal mortality and achieve universal access to reproductive health by 2015. Let us devote greater attention and resources to the work to improve the health and quality of life for all people.