

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE MIDWIFE - 5 MAY 2005 KABUL, AFGHANISTAN

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INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF MIDWIVES (ICM)**

The 5th of May every year marks an auspicious occasion as people gather together, such as we are now, to celebrate the International Day of the Midwife. Today I am honored and privileged to be sharing this celebration with you in the knowledge that the midwives of Afghanistan, through their vision and resolve, have given birth to their own professional association. They have declared their commitment to function as a strong and influential profession in their own country on behalf of women and their families and as an active member of an international network.

As part of your celebrations on this day I bring you greetings from the Board and Executive of the International Confederation of Midwives (ICM). The International Confederation consists of over 80 national midwifery associations from 73 countries and was founded in 1919.

The ICM is the only international midwifery organisation formally recognised by the United Nations. The ICM together with its various and valued partners who include the World Health Organisation (WHO), the Federation of International Gynecologists and Obstetricians (FIGO) and the International Council of Nurses (ICN), and the White Ribbon Alliance (WRA) to name but a few, aims to advance world wide the aims and aspirations of midwives in the attainment of improved outcomes for women in their child bearing years, their newborns and their families wherever they reside.

ICM shares the belief of many, that midwives are a voice for healthy families. Where midwifery is strong, the health of women tends to be better and this has a positive impact on families and the well being of children as they grow from newborn to adult. Without healthy women you won't have healthy children and without healthy children you won't have a healthy nation.

The International Day of the Midwife was launched in 1992 by the ICM as a day to celebrate midwifery and bring awareness of the importance of midwives work to as many people as possible. This is done in many ways such as through special events, conferences, giving awards, raising money for extra resources, a parade or setting up stalls in markets to provide information on midwifery services.

Every year the ICM agrees to a theme to emphasise a particular aspect of midwives work. The theme for this year is *Midwives and women – a partnership for health*.

The midwife's partnership relationship with the woman she cares for is unique among health practitioners. The word midwife means 'with woman.' A midwife is a person who has been educated to provide care to childbearing women and families This includes pre-pregnancy counseling, antenatal, labour and postnatal care, referring to other health professionals as appropriate.

Midwives have commented that the continuity of skills and care across a spectrum of time in a woman's life is unique to midwifery and identifies it as separate from other health professions. Central to this continuum of care is the relationship that develops between a woman and her midwife and the subsequent impact on health outcomes and morbidity.

Many international studies have shown women value the skilled and compassionate care and the opportunity to develop a relationship with their midwife. This may increase the level of trust between the woman and the midwife during experiences of labour and giving birth. This relationship is welcomed by most women. In describing midwifery care women the world over identify key issues as being in control of the birth environment, the opportunity to develop supportive interpersonal relationships with midwives, to have a safe birth and to be treated with respect and dignity.

Greater visibility and utilisation of the professional midwife as the skilled care attendant and the support of midwifery models of care are therefore central components in any reforms. These reforms are necessary in many countries to enable the various models of public health care to develop.

The World Health report released by the WHO in India in April this year indicates that every year over 200 million women in the world become pregnant and 136 million give birth. All these women need skilled professional care. In spite of poverty, war, inequality and disease the key obstacle is exclusion from good quality care. As the Secretary General of the WHO remarked at the opening of a session during the Commission on the Status of Women in New York recently *“as we look back on the last decade one thing stands out above all else we have learnt that the challenges facing women are not problems without solutions. We have learnt what works and what doesn't work. We must now take specific targeted actions on a number of fronts. Study after study has taught us that there is no tool more effective than the empowerment of women and no other policy is as likely to raise economic productivity or to reduce infant and maternal mortality”*.

Midwives through their professional organisation are in a privileged position to support the third goal of the Millennium Goals which is *to promote gender equality and empower women*. The achievement of this goal is critical to achieving the mission of safe motherhood. If midwives wish to be considered professionals and advocates for women then it is their right and their responsibility to belong and to promote their national organisation and to work with their international colleagues through the ICM to promote women's health and midwifery care globally.

We must always remember that as Joy Phumaphi, the Assistant Director General of the WHO has said:

“We know the causes. “We have the solutions. “We can make a difference.”

The health of women and newborns depends on YOU and ME

Midwives of Afghanistan, the ICM congratulates you on your achievements thus far and eagerly awaits your associations membership in the ICM and to hear of your, what I am confident will be, outstanding progress in the future.

Thank you