

MEDIA RELEASE

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WORLD POPULATION DAY – MONDAY 11TH JULY

Ruth Forrest MLC highlights the relevance to Tasmania, of World Population Day, which is celebrated on July 11th this year.

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) 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.

Ms Forrest said that UNFPA's activities touch on the most sensitive and intimate spheres of human existence, including reproductive health and rights, gender relations and population issues, and attitudes about these subjects vary widely between and among different cultures.

The theme of World Population Day 2005 is 'Equality Empowers'.

Equality benefits everyone. Human rights, and thus equality, must be at the centre of efforts to reduce poverty, discrimination and conflict.

Ms Forrest said that when considering inequality, a focus on the inequities girls and women face not only in developing countries, but also in Tasmania, should be considered, and reflected in Government policy.

A report from the United Nations population Fund (UNFPA) states, "Where girls have equal opportunity to education, societies become more prosperous. Where women have equal access to income, assets and services, families become healthier. When both men and women are able to participate equally and exercise their full human rights, the world benefits".

"I would suggest that in Tasmania, the majority of girls and women have equal access to education, income, assets and services and that generally the community recognises that women play an important part in reducing poverty and fostering sustainable development.

"The benefits of gender equality include a higher quality of life for individual women and girls, and stronger families and communities", Ruth Forrest MLC stated.

However, the incidence of perhaps the highest cost of gender discrimination, across the world, violence against women and girls, continues.

This remains one of the most pervasive and shameful human rights violations that compromises the personal security, liberty, dignity and well-being of women and children.

Ms Forrest said that the Tasmanian Government has implemented programs to address these issues, such as the "Safe at Home" programs, however legislation that supports this initiative is in many cases not achieving the outcomes expected and some of those most vulnerable in our society continue to be at risk.

Other costs of inequality are perhaps easier to see and measure in developing countries. These include the high rates of maternal death and disability because women's health is not made a political priority and poor sexual and reproductive health is a leading cause of death and illness for women in the developing world.

UNFPA states, 'the single most critical intervention for safe motherhood is to ensure that a health worker with midwifery skills is present at every birth, and transportation is available to a more comprehensive level of obstetric care in case of an emergency.'

In the developing world, every minute, a woman dies from treatable complications of pregnancy or childbirth. Every minute, a family is devastated.

The lives of surviving children are put at risk and communities suffer. And for every woman who dies, as many as 20 others are seriously harmed by fistula or other injuries of childbearing.

"Whilst these sobering statistics are thankfully not transferable to Tasmania, State and Federal Government policy needs to reflect the importance of these interventions and ensure all Tasmanian women have the opportunity to be cared for by skilled midwives and doctors, with transport to high standard facilities in the event of complications", Ms Forrest stated.

"This not only promotes safe outcomes for women, but also improved outcomes for babies. This care extends to promotion and support for breastfeeding", said the Member for Murchison.

Ms Forrest said that breastfeeding has many benefits for not only the baby, but also the mother and the community. Considering that World Population Day 2005 is about equity and choice for women, an additional benefit for many women in developing countries is the effect breastfeeding has in reducing fertility.

"This can have benefits in many areas including costs to the family and community and promotes the ideal that every pregnancy is intended", Ms Forrest said.

"State and Federal Government policies should reflect the important economic, health, social and environmental benefits breastfeeding brings and actively support ventures, such as initiatives including 'UNICEF Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative' and other programs offered through organisations including the Australian Breastfeeding Association," Ms Forrest stated.

It is particularly important to target groups particularly at risk of low breastfeeding rates, including very young mothers and those from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds.

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For further information, please phone 0419 879 524.

Fast Facts on Maternal Mortality and Morbidity

The Dimensions of the Tragedy

- Every minute, a woman somewhere dies in pregnancy or childbirth. This adds up to 1400 women dying each day — an estimated 529,000 each year — from pregnancy-related causes.
- For each woman who dies, about 20 women survive, but suffer from serious disease, disability or physical damage caused by complications of pregnancy or childbirth.

1 in 16: The risk of an African woman dying from a complication related to pregnancy or childbirth

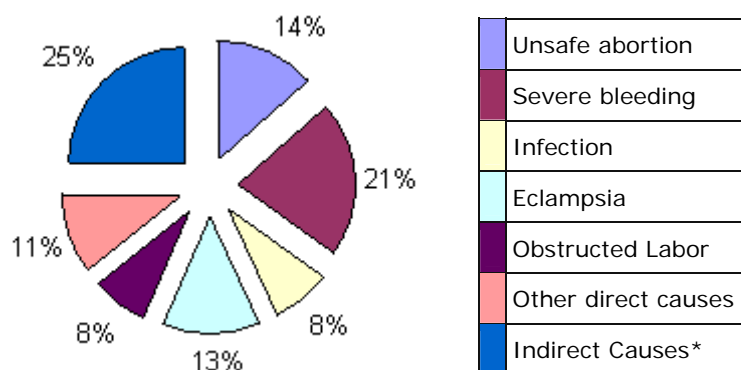
1 in 2800: The risk of a woman from a developed country dying from a complication related to pregnancy or childbirth

- A million or more children are left motherless each year as a result of maternal mortality. These children are 3 to 10 times more likely to die within two years than children who live with both parents.
- Almost half — about 3.4 million out of 8 million — of infant deaths per year result from poor maternal health and inadequate delivery care.

While many other health indicators have improved over the last two decades, maternal mortality rates have shown little improvement.

The Causes of Maternal Death

- Up to 15 per cent of pregnant women in ALL population groups experience potentially fatal complications — 20 million women each year.
- More than 80 percent of maternal deaths worldwide are due to five direct causes: haemorrhage, sepsis, unsafe abortion, obstructed labour and hypertensive disease of pregnancy.



**Indirect causes include: anaemia, malaria, heart disease.
Source: Understanding the Causes of Maternal Deaths. Distance Learning Pilot Course. UNFPA, 2001.*

- Approximately 5 per cent of pregnant women — 7 million women — need surgery, most often a Caesarean section, and many are without access to emergency obstetric care. This unmet need results in 500,000 to 1 million women living with a painful disability.
- Only 58 per cent of women in developing countries deliver with the assistance of a professional (a midwife or doctor), and only 40 per cent give birth in a hospital or health centre.
- Most maternal deaths (61 per cent) take place during delivery or in the immediate post-partum period. Some 3.4 million neonatal deaths occur within the first week of life.

Moving Forward

- Meeting the existing demand for family planning services would reduce maternal deaths and injuries by 20 per cent or more.
- According to reproductive health benchmark set by the ICPD+ 5, by 2005, at least 40 per cent of births should be assisted by skilled birth attendants where maternal mortality is very high, and 80 per cent globally.
- Targets for the percentage of assisted births have been set at 50 and 85 per cent, respectively, by 2010, and 60 and 90 per cent by 2015.
- Evidence shows that maternal mortality can be reduced without first achieving high levels of economic development. In fact, maternal mortality itself constrains economic development, because of its severe impact on the lives of young children, the family and society in general.