

## **Reproductive health and birth spacing programmes must become a priority in Somalia**

**Nairobi, Kenya, 11 July 2008** – Today, as we celebrate World Population Day, urgent action is needed to reduce maternal mortality and eradicate extreme poverty and hunger by 2015, according to UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund.

"Urgent action is needed because the goal to improve maternal health is generating the least resources and lagging the furthest behind" said Ms. Thoraya Ahmed Obaid, UNFPA Executive Director, on World Population Day.

More than 200 million women worldwide lack access to reproductive health services, including birth spacing, which results in thousands of unintended pregnancies, ill health and maternal deaths.

Somalia still has one of the world's highest maternal mortality rates; for every 100,000 live births, 1,044 women die. These rates will be significantly reduced if every Somali woman had access to health services throughout her life cycle, especially during pregnancy and childbirth.

It is crucial to accelerate efforts to ensure that reproductive health programmes for Somali women, men and young people are realized to reach them all in the communities where they live.

Three reproductive health services are essential to improve maternal health: (1) skilled attendants during delivery, (2) emergency obstetric care and (3) birth spacing to choose the timing of births. Birth spacing programmes can also prevent the spread of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS.

In 1968, world leaders proclaimed that individuals have a basic human right to determine freely and responsibly the number and timing of their children. Yet, the proportion of global funds allocated to family planning has declined from 55 per cent in 1995 to 8 per cent in 2006 – dropping from \$723 million to \$551 million. This current level of funding is less than half of the \$ 1.2 billion needed to fulfil the present unmet needs.

Today, UNFPA is committed to continue its support for universal access to health care and equal opportunity for all. UNFPA Somalia is responding to the priority needs of reproductive health information and services, including birth spacing, in collaboration with Somali partners throughout the country.

We call on all governments and communities to ensure universal access to reproductive health in Somalia, and to support this promise through political and financial investments. The time has come to make reproductive health a priority.

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**On reproductive rights** – In 1968, the International Conference on Human Rights, held in Tehran, declared: “Parents have a basic human right to determine freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children” (article 16). The 1974 World Population Conference added: “[...] and to have information and means to do so”. The Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, stated: “The human rights of women include their right to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination and violence” (Beijing Platform for Action, para. 96).

**About UNFPA** – The United Nations Population Fund is an international development agency working in more than 150 countries and territories 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.

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