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Governments urged to do more to prevent women dying in pregnancy and childbirth

Amnesty International today urged countries to accelerate efforts to combat maternal mortality, after new UN figures confirmed that despite some progress, countries will miss a key global target on the issue.

The number of women dying due to complications during pregnancy and childbirth has decreased from an estimated 546 000 in 1990 to 358 000 in 2008, according to a report issued by several UN agencies on Wednesday.

The figures showed that the annual rate of decline in maternal mortality is less than half of that needed to achieve the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) target of reducing maternal mortality by 75 per cent between 1990 and 2015.

“Although a woman is no longer dying every minute, according to the new statistics one woman is still dying every minute and a half”, said Widney Brown, Amnesty International’s Senior Director for International Law and Policy.

“Amnesty International welcomes the progress that has been made but the fact remains that hundreds and thousands of women die every year in pregnancy and childbirth, though these deaths are preventable.”

“No women should die while giving birth, when such deaths are preventable. Governments need to do much more to ensure that the most disadvantaged and poorest women have equal and timely access to life saving care.”

The new figures were published as heads of states prepare to meet and review progress on the MDGs at a UN summit in New York on 20-22 September.

“Governments need to intensify their efforts to ensure that all women enjoy their rights to maternal, sexual and reproductive health and choice. said Widney Brown.

Notes to editors

The World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the World Bank released a new report today, Trends in maternal mortality. The report highlighted that the 34 per cent decline since 1990 represents an average annual decline of just 2.3 per cent, falling short of the 5.5 per cent decline needed to meet the target and indicating that most countries around the world will miss the 2015 target.

Amnesty International is campaigning on maternal mortality under the Demand Dignity campaign, which aims to end the human rights violations that drive and deepen global poverty. The campaign will mobilise people all over the world to demand that governments, corporations and others who have power listen to the voices of those living in poverty and recognise and protect their rights. For more information visit: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/demand-dignity>

The MDGs, which remain the most prominent global initiative to address poverty, were drawn from the Millennium Declaration adopted 10 years ago and agreed by World leaders who committed to achieving the targets by 2015.