Speech for the International Day of the Midwife 2014

Dr. M. Hulki Uz, UNFPA, The United Nations Population Fund, I.R. Iran

5 May 2014

Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

As UNFPA Representative, it is a great honour and pleasure for me to be here today to address all of you on the occasion of the International Day of the Midwife.

In the beginning, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Midwifery office of the Ministry of Health and Medical Education for arranging this important gathering.

Globally, in the past two decades, maternal death has declined by nearly half. In the same period, skilled birth attendance has increased by 15 per cent, with two out of three deliveries worldwide now attended by a skilled health professional. With just over 600 days left until the Millennium Development Goals deadline, concerted efforts are required to scale up cost-effective interventions in educating midwives and other professionals with midwifery skills.”

Across the world, midwives have played a key role in achieving the Millennium Development Goals related to maternal and new-born mortality. Iran is one of the few countries to have already achieved MDG 5A, namely to reduce by three quarters the maternal mortality rate. Not only has Iran reached MDG 5A – it has also surpassed it, with an 83 percent drop in the MMR between 1990 and 2012. I want to congratulate you on this remarkable achievement.

Every year, nearly 40 million women give birth without skilled care, increasing the risk of death and disability for both the mother and newborn. Investments in midwives can help avert a significant number of the nearly 290,000 maternal deaths and three million newborn deaths that occur annually due to the lack of well-educated and regulated health workers and adequate facilities. These global figures stand in stark contrast to
Iran, where 96.4% of deliveries are assisted by skilled attendants, reflecting the government’s political commitment to the issue of maternal health.

While Iran has made remarkable progress in improving safe motherhood, approximately 300 women still die annually due to pregnancy related complications. This amounts to almost one woman every day. UNFPA has a long history of working with Iranian government partners on midwifery and further improving safe motherhood, and we are proud of our strong partnership with the Ministry of Health and Medical Education.

In 2014, we will be working on a number of important initiatives. These include supporting the development of an action plan on the current national midwifery-led care strategy, supporting a revision of five training protocols for midwives, and support to midwifery-led care in selected hospitals.

A growing number of studies have shown that midwifery-led care leads to better outcomes for the majority of women. Women who receive continued care from midwives throughout pregnancy and birth are less likely to give birth pre-term and require fewer interventions during labour and birth. In midwifery-led care, emphasis is placed on normality, continuity of care and being cared for by a known, trusted midwife during labour.

I would also like to inform you that, as an example of South-South cooperation, UNFPA Iran and UNFPA Afghanistan recently facilitated an Iranian midwifery expert to travel to Kabul and conduct a consultancy reviewing and updating the Afghan bachelor-level midwifery degree. The consultancy was a great success, and the Afghan government entities involved were very satisfied with the results.

In 2014, UNFPA will be expanding our work on South-South cooperation through a project to strengthen community midwifery services in Afghanistan using Iranian expertise, and by training Afghan refugees in Iran on midwifery. This is just one example of South-South cooperation, and how we can share Iran’s expertise on safe motherhood with other countries in the region, particularly Islamic countries.
As is the case in many countries, in Iran, specialists have taken over an increasing number of traditional midwifery tasks. At the same time, the rate of C-sections is rising, making up an average of 45% of all births, and up to 67% in some provinces. Last October, UNFPA and the Ministry of Health and Medical Education supported a comprehensive academic management training of 50 senior midwives from across Iran. The goal was to empower midwives, encourage natural births, and ultimately, improve the health of mothers in Iran. I am happy to inform you that the course received an overwhelmingly positive feedback.

On the occasion of International Day of the Midwife, UNFPA is pleased to be launching the ‘Ethical Code for Midwifery’ in partnership with the Midwifery Office within the Ministry of Health and Medical Education. The Ethical Code for Iran has been developed based on various country experiences, taking into account social and cultural factors. The Code covers issues such as professional obligations, providing service to clients, communication with colleagues, education and research, and management, and will seek to standardize the ethical obligations of midwives in Iran.

In wrapping up, I would like to share with you a quote from the UNFPA Executive Director, Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin on today’s occasion:

“On this International Day of the Midwife, UNFPA and the International Confederation of Midwives applaud all committed midwives who work beyond the call of duty, most often in difficult circumstances and with limited resources, to provide maternal and newborn care to women and girls around the world. We jointly reaffirm our pledge to support midwives globally as we work towards the goal of ensuring that every pregnancy is safe and that universal access to reproductive health services is a reality for all.”

UNFPA looks forward to continuing its work with Iranian government counterparts to support midwifery-led care, further improve reproductive health, and to share the successful experience of Iran with other countries.

Thank you.