

On International Day, UN honours midwives as family ‘partners for life’

5 May 2017 – The United Nations population agency today urged governments and development partners to expand midwifery programmes and promote an environment where midwives can effectively serve the needs of women and their families.

Midwives save lives, support and promote healthy families, and empower women and couples to choose whether, when and how often to have children, [said](#) Babatunde Osotimehin, Executive Director of the UN Population Fund ([UNFPA](#)) on the occasion of International Day of the Midwife.

They also help avert sexually transmitted infections and prevent disabilities like obstetric fistula, mother-to-child transmission of HIV and female genital mutilation, he added.

Each year, more than 300,000 women die during pregnancy and childbirth. The UN also estimates that some three million babies do not survive the first month of life, and another 2.5 million are stillborn.

Most of them could have been saved by the care of well-trained midwives within the framework of strong health systems, Dr. Osotimehin said.

This year’s theme for the Day ‘Midwives, Mothers and Families: Partners for Life!’ underscores the important roles that these women and girls have in preventing maternal and newborn deaths and empowering women to make informed, healthy choices.

These are critical aspects of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)), which seek to alleviate poverty and assist the planet, by the 2030 deadline.

Also today, the UN World Health Organization ([WHO](#)) reiterated the importance of midwives washing their hands and maintaining hygienic standards.

[Handwashing and lack of water and sanitation](#) is a fundamental constraint to quality of care, says Fran McConville, midwifery adviser, WHO. As midwives we must work in partnership to improve access to water, sanitation and electricity for all women and babies everywhere.

Worldwide, 30,000 women and 400,000 babies die every year from infections, such as puerperal sepsis, often caused by lack of water, sanitation and poor hand-washing practices.

As rainy season starts, UN health agency warns of cholera outbreak in drought-hit Somalia

5 May 2017 – Somalia is suffering from the largest cholera outbreak in the past five years and the number of people killed is expected to double by the end of June, the United Nations health agency.

The UN World Health Organization ([WHO](#)) reported close to 32,000 cases of cholera, including 618 deaths, since the beginning of the year.

The drought had led to a lack of clean water and the largest cholera outbreak in Somalia in the past five years, Tarik Jasarevic, spokesman for the WHO, told journalists in Geneva.

He noted that the case fatality rate of cholera is 1.9 per cent, with an emergency threshold of 1 per cent. Those numbers are expected to double at the end of next month, as the overall numbers jump due to the start this week of the rainy season.

Lack of access to clean water and hygiene, food insecurity and malnutrition caused by drought are worsening the figures.

There may be more than 50,000 cases of cholera in 2017 in Somalia, Mr. Jasarevic said.

The UN is working with partners to provide medicines and medical supplies, and train health staff. In addition, a vaccination campaign reached more than 450,000 people in March, and a [second round](#) was launched yesterday.

In addition to cholera, Somalis are faced with the threat of measles as a result of a low vaccination rate, and massive displacement and crowding as a result of the drought.

A campaign had been planned to vaccinate half-a-million children between the ages of six months and five years of age, but the required \$2.7 million have not yet been met.

World needs 'soft power' of education, culture, sciences, to combat 'ancient

hatreds' – UNESCO chief

5 May 2017 – 'Hard power' can no longer stop conflicts nor the rise of violent extremism and 'ancient hatreds' such as antisemitism and racial discrimination, the head of the United Nations cultural agency said today, insisting that 'we need 'soft power' of education, knowledge, culture, communication, the sciences, to strengthen the values we share and recognize the destiny we hold in common.'

Irina Bokova, the Director-General of the UN Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) made this [call](#) at the opening ceremony of the [Fourth World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue](#) hosted by the Government of Azerbaijan in the country's capital, Baku, and co-organized along with UNESCO, the UN Alliance of Civilizations.

More than 500 participants from around the world are attending the Forum under the theme 'Advancing Intercultural Dialogue – New avenues for human security, peace and sustainable development.'

Ms. Bokova praised President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan for his 'longstanding leadership in promoting intercultural dialogue' as well as the tireless engagement of the First Lady, Mehriban Aliyeva, as UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for Oral and Musical Traditions.

Azerbaijan has a long history on the 'Silk Road' ancient trade route, as a centre for exchange, scholarship and art. Baku's [Walled City](#) is also inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

Conflicts across the world are tearing countries apart with civilians hardest hit, Ms. Bokova warned, pointing to the rise of violent extremism and 'cultural cleansing,' as well as what she called 'ancient hatreds' like antisemitism, racial discrimination and intolerance.

'We see mosques, churches and other temples destroyed and cultural diversity threatened,' the UNESCO chief told a room full of dignitaries and representatives of the public, private and non-profit sector. 'We see education under attack and children forced out of learning. We see freedom of expression threatened, journalists attacked. We see societies closing against perceived 'others,' and minorities persecuted.'

In this context, Ms. Bokova argued, the world has no choice but to respond while remaining true to the compass setting of human rights and dignity.

Of late, she added, hard power is not enough. The world needs the soft power of education, knowledge, culture, communication, the sciences, to strengthen the values we share and recognize the destiny we hold in common.

Picking up that thread, Nassir Abdulaziz, UN High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC), in his address [said](#) military actions and security measures cannot be the only response to the world's challenges. 'The interconnected nature of today's crises requires us to connect our

own efforts for peace and security, sustainable development and human rights, not just in words, but in practice,” he said.

“The challenge now is to make corresponding changes to our culture, strategy, structures and operations. We must commit to achieve human security and sustainable development, in partnership with regional organizations, mobilizing the entire range of those with influence, from religious authorities to civil society and the business community, he said, adding that women and youth must also be brought to the table.

The Baku Process has become a successful platform to promote “peaceful and inclusive societies” around the world. Since its inception, Mr. Al-Nasser said, the Forum has encouraged and enabled people and communities worldwide to take concrete measures to support diversity, dialogue and mutual understanding amongst nations.

The focus of this year's Forum is particularly significant, he continued, adding that human security places people at the centre of multidisciplinary approaches and response, including development and human rights.

UNESCO is a main partner of the Forum in addition to organizations such as the UN World Tourism Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization, the Council of Europe, the Islamic Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) and the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe.

[Keep interests of people above all else, UN Security Council urges political actors in DR Congo](#)

5 May 2017 – Voicing concern over challenges to the implementation of last year's political agreement in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and deteriorating humanitarian and security situation, the United Nations Security Council has urged all stakeholders to redouble their efforts to resolve the problems faced by the country.

The agreement, popularly referred to as the ཛ December agreement' represented a significant step towards a peacefully managed transition. However, its implementation has since seen considerable difficulties.

“Effective, swift and timely implementation of the agreement is critical to a credible process and the peace and stability of the DRC, as well as in supporting the legitimacy of the transitional institutions, as it represents a viable road map towards the holding of peaceful and democratic elections,” said members of the Security Council in a [statement](#) late yesterday.

Among others, the agreement has stipulated that peaceful, credible, inclusive and timely elections would be organized in DRC no later than December 2017, and would include the participation of all sectors of the society, in particular women.

Also in the statement, the members urged for the swift and inclusive establishment of a government of national unity, the *Comité National de Suivi de l'Accord*, the adoption of a new electoral law and the full implementation of the confidence building measures in chapter V of the 31 December 2016 agreement, some of which are yet to be implemented.

They also urged all national political stakeholders to overcome their differences, uphold the interests of their people and ensure that they are guided by the rule of law, restraint and the spirit of compromise and dialogue.

In that regard, they called on all political actors, whether in the country or abroad, to desist from any actions that could exacerbate tensions.

Further in the statement, the members of Security Council condemned violence and alleged violations and abuses of human rights in the Kasai region as well as the deteriorating humanitarian and security situation in the region, which according to reports, has displaced more than one million people within the country and more than 11,000 across its borders.

The members also stressed the need for a swift and full investigation into the killing of the two members of the Group of Experts established pursuant to Security Council resolution 1533 (2004) and underlined the need for full cooperation from the Government.

In this context, they further welcomed the Secretary General's establishment of a UN Board of Inquiry to investigate the deaths of the two experts and his commitment that the UN will do everything possible to ensure that the perpetrators are brought to justice.

[New UN study makes 'strong' economic case for Africa's investment in green energy](#)

5 May 2017 – Charting data from 54 African countries, a new UN atlas reveals the continent's energy potential; revealing that investment in renewable energy would strengthen its economic advancement.

The Atlas makes a strong case that [investments in green energy infrastructure](#) can bolster Africa's economic development and bring it closer

to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)),” said Juliette Biao Koudoukou, Director and Regional Representative of the Africa Office for the UN Environment Programme ([UNEP](#)).

As such, she continued, it is an important policy guide for African governments as they strive to catalyze national development by making use of their energy resources.

The Atlas of Africa Energy Resources , released by UNEP and the African Development Bank at the World Economic Forum being held in Durban, South Africa, shows both the potential and the fragility of the continent’s energy resources, which are at the heart of Africa’s socio-economic development.

While Africa is richly endowed with both renewable and non-renewable energy resources, its current energy production is insufficient to meet demand. About a third Africa’s population still lacks access to electricity and 53 per cent of the population depends on biomass for cooking, space heating and drying.

According to UNEP, energy consumption on the continent is the lowest in the world, and per capita consumption has barely changed since 2000. The poorest African households spend 20 times more per unit of energy than wealthy households when connected to the grid. A kettle boiled twice by a family in the United Kingdom uses five times as much electricity as a Malian uses in a year, according to UNEP.

”This Atlas will be instrumental to ease access to information and data in the energy sector for all stakeholders, including the donor community, African governments and the private sector,” said Amadou Hott, Vice-President in charge of power, energy, climate and green growth, African Development Bank.



Windmills rise above the New Port on Victoria’s Inner Harbour on Mahe Island, Seychelles. Photo: David Stanley/UNEP Atlas of Africa report

Providing information in the form of detailed ‘before and after’ images, charts, maps and other satellite data from 54 countries through visuals, the Atlas details the challenges and opportunities in providing Africa’s population with access to reliable, affordable and modern energy services.

Prepared in cooperation with the Environment Pulse Institute, United States Geological Survey and George Mason University, the Atlas consolidates the information on the energy landscape in Africa, highlighting some success stories of sustainable energy development around the continent, but also shining a light on major environmental challenges associated with energy infrastructure development.