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3000 MIDWIVES GATHER TO TACKLE MATERNAL MORTALITY AND MORBIDITY

Midwives from over 111 countries will gather today at the International Confederation of Midwives Triennial Congress in Durban, South Africa. They will call for governments worldwide to take the necessary steps to end needless deaths of women in pregnancy and childbirth. Congress will start with an inaugural rally and march at 1.30pm on the 18th June, when 1000 Congress delegates and supporters will walk for 5km through the city. This is the first time ICM has held a Congress in Africa. The event and the march represent a show of solidarity with mothers and midwifery colleagues across a continent which has some of the highest rates of maternal and infant mortality in the world. According to global estimates around 364,000 women die in pregnancy and childbirth each year. 99% of these deaths occur in low resource countries.

Congress delegates will be joined by high profile maternal health advocates, including the First Ladies of Kenya and Malawi and will participate in a comprehensive peer reviewed scientific programme. The programme will include key contributions from global agencies including the United Nations, the Gates Foundation, the Federation of Gynaecologists and Obstetricians alongside individual experts in clinical midwifery practice and policy. The programme has been organised by the South African Midwives' Association and aims to strengthen the capacity of midwives to tackle the five major causes of maternal mortality worldwide.

The landmark event will provide the global launch site for a major global report on the state of the world's midwifery, created in partnership with 26 international agencies, including ICM and led by the UN Population Fund (UNFPA). The *State of the World's Midwifery Report :Delivering Health, Saving Lives* presents an overview of the number, skills level and distribution of life saving midwives in those countries which experience the highest rates of maternal death. The report will be launched on 20th June at 12.00 by the Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Dr Babatunde Osotimehin and ICM President Bridget Lynch.

The ICM Congress will also see the launch of new global standards for midwifery education and professional regulation. These will provide national governments with the tools they need to address dangerous shortfalls in access to qualified midwifery and support them to deliver targets for maternal and infant health improvement. They have been developed in consultation with professional midwives, educators and maternal health policy experts over three years. Global in their scope, the standards

answer the needs of those countries which face the greatest challenges in ensuring that women in childbirth are attended by professionals with essential midwifery skills.

Confederation President, Bridget Lynch said 'This Congress sees midwives taking their place as an essential part of the maternal healthcare workforce and marks a milestone achievement for our profession. We are the first healthcare profession to establish global standards for education, regulation and midwifery competence. The standards pave the way for high quality midwifery services. By launching these alongside *Delivering Health, Saving Lives* we will have a global picture of what is needed, the evidence of what works and the tools we need to deliver in those countries where mothers pay the heaviest price for giving life.' said Bridget Lynch, ICM President.

More information about the International Confederation of Midwives and the Durban Congress can be found at www.internationalmidwives.org .

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