

*New York, Jun 17 2011* - The United Nations is set to unveil a report highlighting the vital work of midwives in ensuring that millions of women and newborn children do not die needlessly at a time when many countries still lack enough skilled staff to serve as birth attendants.

The report, *The State of the World's Midwifery 2011: delivering health, saving lives*, is the first of its kind and draws on data gathered from 58 countries.

Co-authored by several UN agencies – including the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO) – and more than 20 international partners, it will be released on Monday at a global conference of midwives taking place in Durban, South Africa.

The report will examine the progress made so far on boosting the numbers of midwives, which are particularly critical to the achievement of two Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): boosting maternal health, and reducing child mortality.

The world continues to lag behind its targets on both those goals, and last year Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon launched a Global Strategy for Women's and Children's Health to try to accelerate action on these issues.

UNFPA, whose Executive Director Babatunde Osotimehin will launch the report on Monday, has estimated that about 900 women die every day and more than 34,000 others experience problems as a result of complications while giving birth.

But the number of midwives – most of whom are women – varies enormously between and within countries, and many regions with high maternal and newborn mortality rates suffer from a shortage of skilled staff.

In some of the world's poorest countries, as few as 13 per cent of all births are assisted by a midwife or a health-care worker with the necessary skills.

Tomorrow about 3,000 midwives participating in the Durban conference are expected to march through the city as a sign of their commitment to improving standards of maternal and newborn care around the world.

Source: [UN News](#)