

Kampala, July 26th, 2010 — Maternal and child deaths are killing more people across the continent than conflicts, the African Union revealed yesterday.

More than 500,000 women a year die in childbirth across the globe, almost exclusively in developing countries in Africa. Another 12,000 children die on the continent every day, mainly from treatable conditions like malaria, pneumonia and respiratory tract infections.

Speaking at the opening of the 15th ordinary summit of heads of state at the Commonwealth Resort in Munyonyo, Mr Jean Ping, the chairperson of the AU Commission told leaders at the summit that efforts to reduce both maternal and child health had been very slow.

"Africa's progress in reducing maternal and child deaths is still slow and today we see more children and women dying needlessly of preventable causes than of conflicts," he said. He said countries across the continent were unlikely to meet their commitment to reduce the problem by up to 75 per cent-the number of women and children who die of preventable causes by 2015.

"No woman should be dying while giving birth and we should all work to speed up progress to reduce such deaths and to ensure safe delivery for every woman," Mr Ping said. Malawi President and chairman of AU Bingu Wa Mutharika, said it was shameful that children and mothers are still dying of easily-preventable causes, describing the deaths as a "crisis".

He urged African leaders to come up with new strategies to make up for lost ground.

Dr Luis Gomes Sambo, the World Health Organisation Regional Director for Africa said increased funding to the health sector would make a big difference.