

**July 20<sup>th</sup> 2011:** Over 250 organisations including White Ribbon Alliance, Merlin, Every Mother Counts and Save the Children, have come together to call for urgent action for more health workers, better supported. For the 2 months prior to the UN General Assembly meetings the organisations will be building pressure on global leaders to deal with the health worker shortfall and make new commitments for supporting health workers.

-

New research published today identifies over 40 million children living in “healthcare deserts” not receiving even the most basic care

-

Every year 48 million women give birth without someone with the proper medical skills present

-

New research highlights ‘healthcare deserts’ in 25 developing countries, where up to one-third of all children do not receive any of the six essential vaccinations for childhood killer diseases or basic treatment for diarrhoea, one of the main causes of child mortality

Christy Turlington Burns, global maternal health advocate and founder of Every Mother Counts, has backed the call saying: “It is unimaginable to go through birth and life without ever receiving the advice and support of a health worker. We know that training just one health worker could help deliver life-saving treatments and save many lives. No mother should die giving life and no child is born to die. It’s time for world leaders to close the health worker gap.”

The organizations are urging people to sign the petition and wear a sticking plaster to show their support for the campaign. “Health workers count. By wearing a plaster and signing the petition we can show world leaders just how urgent it is that we ensure there are enough health workers,” says Jasmine Whitbread Chief Executive of Save the Children International “Without

them there are too many children dying from preventable causes.” They are encouraging people to get involved via the website <http://www.healthworkerscount.org>

The launch coincides with a new report published by Save the Children that shows that 40 million children live in “healthcare deserts” without receiving the most basic of healthcare services. New research by the charity has uncovered ‘healthcare deserts’ in 25 developing countries around the world, where up to one-third of all children do not receive any vaccinations for childhood killer diseases, such as diphtheria, whooping cough and tetanus, or even basic treatment for diarrhoea. In some instances areas are too remote and unreached by healthcare services. In most cases the term describes a situation where services are unfamiliar, unknown, unaffordable, unavailable, or of such poor quality that people are not using them.

At present the world is suffering from a massive gap of more than 3.5 million health workers in low income countries, and an even more if countries like India are included. This includes a pressing need for at least 1 million community health workers and 350,000 midwives. Millions more existing health workers lack the support, equipment and training they need. If the health worker gap is not filled, then the world will not meet the UN’s Millennium Development Goals on child and maternal mortality.

Over 250 organisations have come together to see world leaders make specific commitments to more “health workers, better supported” at the UN General Assembly meetings in New York on September 20.

Justin Forsyth of Save the Children has just returned from East Africa says: “Right now in East Africa drought and rising food prices have left 9 million people facing a devastating food crisis. When the worst happens being stranded in a healthcare desert is a matter of life and death”-