

New York, 19 May 2011 – Sixteen countries have [announced](#) concrete commitments aimed at drastically reducing current levels of maternal, newborn and child mortality, the United Nations reported today.

The commitments, largely in the form of specific budgetary increases for maternity and natal care, and promises of increased medical coverage for mothers and children, were [announced](#) as part of the Global Strategy for Women's and Children's Health, a \$40 billion programme that

[Secretary-General](#)

Ban Ki-moon launched last year. The new commitments bring to 34 the number of countries making such public pledges, with 27 in Africa.

Mr. Ban welcomed the announcement, saying the commitments build on recent momentum towards tackling women's and children's health problems.

"Political and financial support for action on women's and children's health is reaching new and encouraging heights," he said.

Echoing those remarks, UN Population Fund ([UNFPA](#)) Executive Director Babatunde Osotimehin said the world is now "on the verge of a tipping point" in the fight against maternal and child mortality.

The new pledges were announced by Burundi, Chad, the Central African Republic (CAR), Comoros, Guinea, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Madagascar, Mongolia, Myanmar, Papua New Guinea, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, Tajikistan, Togo, and Viet Nam.

The commitments, made with the support of THE Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS ([UNAIDS](#)), the UN Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)), the World Bank, UNFPA and the World Health Organization ([WHO](#)), focus on measures proven effective in preventing deaths, such as increased contraceptive use, attended childbirth, improved access to emergency obstetric care, prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV, and greater childhood immunizations.

Eight countries promised specific increases in the national budgets for medical care for women and children. Others announced specific goals in increasing the coverage area and numbers for such care. At least 10 countries making new commitments promised to increase the number of midwives.

Every year, 358,000 women in the developing world aged 15-49 die of pregnancy and childbirth-related complications, 2.6 million children are stillborn, and a further 8.1 million die before their fifth birthday, including 3.3 million babies in the first month of life.

UNICEF Executive Director Anthony Lake and WHO Director-General Margaret Chan said the pledges will also help with efforts to try to attain the social and economic targets known as the Millennium Development Goals ([MDGs](#)), which have a deadline of 2015.

Source: [UN News](#)