Background information:

Globally, on the 5th of May, the world marks the celebration of the International Day of the Midwife. The 5th of May is an internationally recognized day for highlighting the work of midwives. It is a day where the world focuses on the role of midwives and midwifery, and calls upon action to everyone to get involved and champion their work. It is also an occasion for every individual midwife to think about the many others in the profession, to make new contacts within and outside midwifery, and to widen the knowledge of what midwives do for the world.

Theme for International Day of the Midwife 2017:

Each year since 1992, the International Confederation of Midwives (ICM) dedicates a theme for the International Day of the Midwife (IDM). The theme for IDM 2017 is "Midwives, Mothers and Families: Partners for Life!". The underlying message to this theme is the recognition that Midwives everywhere understand that by working in partnership with women and their families, they can support them to make better decisions about what they need to have a safe and fulfilling birth.

The ICM has developed a resource pack for this day and this useful resource can be accessed at http://internationalmidwives.org

Advocacy objectives for IDM 2017:

a) Informing the public that midwives are crucial to reducing maternal and neonatal mortality; promoting health in communities and providing continuum of care to women from pre pregnancy, pregnancy, to childbirth and post pregnancy period.

b) Celebrating the achievements of midwives in communities.

c) Motivating policymakers to increase investments to strengthen quality midwifery education, regulations, services and working conditions for midwives, within a functional health system.
On the occasion on the International Day of the Midwife, it is also important to:

a) Highlight that midwives are the backbone of healthy families and communities. Safe motherhood is every woman’s basic human right. Every woman deserves access to quality midwifery care during pregnancy and childbirth.

b) Highlight that reducing maternal and newborn mortality globally still remains a huge challenge. Each year 303,000 women continue to die in pregnancy and childbirth; and almost 3 million babies die in the first few weeks of birth; 99% of these deaths occur in developing countries. Therefore, we need to urgently address the global shortage of midwives and ensure that they are competent and properly educated and trained to global standards.

c) Highlight the need of an adequate policy framework and better working conditions to ensure proper deployment and retention of well-trained midwives.

d) Bring visibility to the value of work performed by midwives during pregnancy and childbirth. Highlight the important role that midwives have been playing in humanitarian emergencies.

Some Global Facts on Midwifery:

- According to WHO’s 2016 “Global strategy on human resources for health: Workforce 2030”, globally in 2013, there was a needs-based shortage of over 9 million nurses and midwives. Majority of these shortages are in South Asia and Africa.
- Globally, maternal mortality ratio has fallen by nearly 44 per cent over the past 25 years (1990-2015) to an estimated 303 000 deaths in 2015. But this was far short of the MDG 5 target of 75% reduction.
- Developing regions account for approximately 99 per cent of the global maternal deaths in 2015.
- Globally, the proportion of deliveries attended by skilled health personnel increased from 59 per cent around 1990 to 71 per cent around 2014 (but only 52% in S. Asia &Sub-Saharan Africa). Yet this leaves more than one in four babies and their mothers without access to crucial skilled midwifery care during childbirth.
- Only half of pregnant women in the developing regions receive the recommended minimum of four antenatal care visits.
- Profound inequalities in access to and use of reproductive health services persist within and across regions. Only 56 per cent of births in rural areas are attended by skilled health personnel, compared with 87 per cent in urban areas.
- Worldwide the proportion of women aged 15 to 49, married or in a union, who were using any method of contraception has increased from 55 per cent in 1990 to 64 per cent in 2015. Midwives are critical in providing family planning information, counseling and services.
• In sub-Saharan Africa, the proportion using contraception has more than doubled between 1990 and 2015, from 13 per cent to 28 per cent. In Southern Asia, the proportion increased from 39 per cent to 59 per cent during the same period.
• In 2015, 12 per cent of married or in-union women of reproductive age worldwide want to delay or avoid pregnancy but are not using any method of contraception.
• Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean have made slow progress in reducing adolescent childbearing.
• Adolescent childbearing remains high in sub-Saharan Africa, at 116 births per 1,000 adolescent girls in 2015. This region has made the least progress since 1990, in both relative terms and absolute numbers.
• Improving maternal health is part of the unfinished agenda for the post-2015 period and is a priority for the achievement of the SDG 2030 agenda.
• Achieving the SDG 3 target of a global MMR below 70 will require a global MMR reduction by an average of 7.5 per cent each year between 2016 and 2030 for which midwifery services are a must. This will require more than three times the 2.3 per cent annual rate of reduction observed globally between 1990 and 2015. Similarly, newborn deaths cannot be eliminated without midwifery services.

**UNFPA global contribution to midwifery:**

**The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) –** is one of the lead UN Agencies on Midwifery

• UNFPA has been a strong supporter of midwifery globally since 2008. It is now supporting midwifery programmes in over 120 countries.
• UNFPA is the only United Nations agency that currently employs 80 midwives as staff, mostly at national level. Over 40 midwives hired by UNFPA are working in South Sudan alone.
• UNFPA has provided support to over 600 midwifery schools globally and fully equipped these with training materials, books and equipment.
• UNFPA works closely with the International Confederation of Midwives (ICM) and a network of over 40 global partners and hundreds of regional and national partners, including ministries of health, education and human resources for health, midwifery associations to strengthen midwifery globally.
• UNFPA has helped train over 90,000 midwives through pre- and in-service training since 2009 and built capacities of over 8,000 tutors in clinical and teaching skills;
• UNFPA has helped revise midwifery curriculum in over 65 countries to ensure compliance with global WHO/ICM standards and mainstreamed midwifery in human resources for health policies in over 50 countries.
• UNFPA has helped integrate midwifery with family planning, HIV, ASRH, GBV and in 2015 UNFPA helped engage midwives and health workers in a global campaign to eliminate female genital mutilation in 17 African countries. Over 1,000 midwives and health workers were sensitized and trained on FGM in 2015 alone.

• UNFPA helped launch the first ever State of the World’s Midwifery Reports (SoWMy) in 2011 and 2014 generating the necessary evidence base for programme planning and advocacy. SoWMy 2014 provides invaluable data from 73 countries for evidence based advocacy.

For more information:
The following can be contacted to get further insights on midwifery in Swaziland, and information on how Swaziland plans to commemorate the International Day of the Midwife 2017.

• UNFPA, Assistant Representative, Ms. Margaret Thwala-Tembe at thwala-tembe@unfpa.org

• UNFPA, National Program Officer – Maternal Health, Ms. Thamary Silindza at silindza@unfpa.org

• WHO, Gender Officer, Ms. Dudu Dlamini at dlaminid@who.int; Communications Officer, Ms. Winile Mavuso at winile.mavuso@yahoo.com

• Ministry of Health, Safe Motherhood Officer, Ms. Bonisile Nhlabatsi at thandashab@yahoo.com; SRH Mentor, Ms. Kayise Madlopha at kayisedee@gmail.com

• SANU, Head of Department Midwifery, Ms. Winnie J Magagula at winniemag@sanu.ac.sz

• Swaziland Midwifery Association, Mr. Zwakele Ngwenya at ngwenyazwakele@gmail.com
Statement by UNFPA Executive Director Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin for the International Day of the Midwife, 5 May 2017

UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, celebrates the heroic and life-saving work that midwives do every day, often in very trying circumstances. Thanks to midwives, millions of women each year are able to exercise their right to sexual and reproductive health services, including voluntary family planning. These services help ensure wanted, healthy pregnancies and safe births.

Yet, far too many women lack access to these services. As a result, each year more than 300,000 women die during pregnancy and childbirth, some 3 million babies do not survive the first month of life, and another two and a half million babies are stillborn. Most of them could have been saved by the care of well-trained midwives within the framework of strong health systems.

UNFPA strongly supports the training and work of midwives in more than 100 countries. Since 2009, UNFPA has worked with partners to support over 600 midwifery schools, educating more than 80,000 midwives. We have also strengthened national midwifery associations in 75 countries and helped enhance the regulatory framework for midwifery practice to ensure accountability.

This year’s theme of the International Day of the Midwife, “Midwives, Mothers and Families: Partners for Life!”, underscores the critical role midwives play. Midwives save lives, support and promote healthy families, and empower women and couples to choose whether, when and how often to have children. They also help avert sexually transmitted infections and prevent disabilities like obstetric fistula, mother-to-child transmission of HIV and female genital mutilation.

Preventing maternal and newborn deaths and disabilities and empowering women to make informed, healthy choices and exercise their rights is key to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. To make this happen, we need to expand midwifery programmes, maintaining the highest global standards, and promote an enabling environment for midwives to effectively serve the needs of women and their families.

On this day, I urge all governments and development partners to join UNFPA in supporting midwives so more women survive and they, their families and communities thrive”.

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