



## Ban Ki-moon gathers global health experts to improve care for world's poorest

9 May 2008 –United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and global health leaders meeting at the Carter Center in the United States city of Atlanta today agreed on measures to help make childbirth safer and tackle other challenges facing the world's poorest and most vulnerable people.

"We are here not only because global health is an enormous challenge, but also because we can do something about it," Mr. Ban said at a [press conference](#) following his meeting with leading global health experts from civil society, academia, philanthropy and the private sector gathered at the Carter Center, with its founder, former US President Jimmy Carter, in attendance.

The meeting attracted the participation of Margaret Chan, the Director-General of the World Health Organization, and previous WHO chief Gro Brundtland, the former Prime Minister of Norway and a member of the Elders, a group of world leaders whose goal is to contribute their wisdom, independent leadership and integrity in tackling some of the world's toughest problems.

The Secretary-General said participants had a productive session. "We have achieved consensus on the urgency of strengthening health systems to serve all, especially the poorest and most vulnerable," he said.

Maternal health was a key focus of the discussions. "We have outlined concrete options to make the process of giving birth safer for mothers, and debated concrete means to improve women's health," the Secretary-General announced.

A mother dies every minute from complications of pregnancy and childbirth. Maternal health is the slowest moving target of the Millennium Development Goals – the goals that all countries have agreed to reach by 2015 to lift people out of poverty.

"It is unacceptable that over half a million mothers die every year," declared Mr. Ban. "We must put a stop to these senseless deaths."

Dr. Chan said women's health is critical. "The world in the last 20 years failed to take care of its women," she said. The maternal mortality rate had not budged in those two decades. She decried the fact that half a million women die in childbirth each year and another half a million suffer from neglected tropical diseases.

Dr. Brundtland agreed that "on the side of mothers, the world is really far away from any improvements and we need to now focus again so that we don't have a woman dying every minute because of childbirth." She said the international community knows what works. "The resources are not outrageous – \$10 billion is nothing in our world today to really make a serious impact on these kinds of issues," she said.

The Secretary-General said participants also targeted neglected diseases like guinea worm and river blindness that "can be eliminated if we only take the time to do so."

More than 1 billion people — one sixth of the world's population — suffer from one or more tropical diseases that are neglected in terms of the international response. Experts say eradication of some of these diseases is possible if treatment is scaled up in the poorest countries, but they caution that functioning and affordable health systems must be in place for progress to be achieved.

President Carter said this was "one of the most important meetings" that he would attend this year. He stressed that to address global health problems, "it is not only a matter of health care but of economic progress for the poorest people on earth."

In his comments to reporters, Mr. Ban also expressed concern about the situation in Myanmar, calling on the authorities to allow aid and humanitarian workers into the country without any hindrance. "I appeal to them strongly to do all they can to facilitate this aid."

Mr. Ban warned that inaction would be deadly. "If early action is not taken and relief measures put in place, the medium-term effect of this tragedy could be truly catastrophic," he said, calling for an end to political differences to address the tremendous challenges ahead. "The sheer survival of the affected people is at stake."