

MESSAGE OF SUPPORT FROM THE MEC FOR HEALTH IN KZN, DR  
SIBONGISENI M DHLOMO, AT THE OCCASION OF KZN MIDWIFERY  
WORKSHOP AT IMBIZO CONFERENCE CENTRE IN EMPANGENI

17 September 2009

Madame Chair,

Rev P S Mlangeni

His Worship the Mayor of Umhlathuze –Cllr A Z Mngayi

Distinguished Guests,

Colleagues, friends and compatriots;

It is my greatest pleasure today to be afforded an opportunity to wish you well on your workshop where you are discussing ways to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and also to save our future. I say this precisely because; as your theme correctly state that – **Midwives: The Anchor of the Nation** – you could not have chosen another theme given the pressures that your profession face.

The sad truth is that every minute a woman dies during pregnancy or childbirth. This adds up to more than thousand women's lives lost every year with hardly any improvement since 1990. Most of these deaths occur in the urban areas and most of these deaths are preventable. As a result of these preventable deaths, the United Nations wrote;

*“The high risk of dying in pregnancy or childbirth continues unabated in sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia ... little progress has been made in saving mothers’ lives.”* **United Nations Development Goals Report, 2008**

It is my fervent wish that this workshop can come up with ways and means of improving this gloomy picture particularly on the attainment of the ring fenced health related Millennium Development Goals

- **MDG 4: *Reduce Child Mortality***

The country is looking forward to Midwives to provide skilled newborn care to achieve this MDG.

Every year in our region and country more than 1 million infants die within their first 24 hours of life due to lack of adequate health services, including midwifery care. The midwives must understand that every childbearing woman deserves to give birth within a safe and supported environment for herself and her baby. Skilled midwifery care includes emergency care for both mothers and their newborns.

- **MDG 5: *Improving Maternal Health***

Midwives are key healthcare providers in achieving this particular MDG as well.

There is the clear message coming from the Ten Point Plan that **we must unite** to pledge increased support to change the picture of our maternal mortality rates.

We have identified mortality in pregnancy and childbirth as the “*highest health inequity in the world with over 99% of deaths occurring in the developing world*” (WHO). We are committed to work with you, Non-Governmental Organizations and civil society organizations to address the urgent need for skilled health workers, particularly midwives.

- **MDG 6: *Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Other Diseases***

Midwives have an essential role in the achievement of this goal as well.

Thousands of pregnant women and hundreds of thousands of newborns die each year due to preventable disease. Throughout the region governments have recognized the primary role of midwives in reducing these devastating deaths. As essential frontline workers, midwives provide vaccines to newborns and children; they identify, counsel and treat pregnant women with HIV and AIDS, thus preventing mother-to-child transmission of HIV; they also provide anti-malarial drugs and bed

nets to vulnerable pregnant women and their children, saving lives and promoting health.

**The achievement of MDGs 4, 5 and 6 requires a concerted commitment to grow a strong, well educated midwifery workforce within functioning health service delivery systems.**

The sense of urgency to achieve MDGs 4, 5 and 6 in the next four years is increasing daily. In this Province we recognize that if we want to achieve these Millennium Development Goals and improve maternal health, we need to invest in midwives. The very fact that yesterday and a day before we started with Graduation ceremonies that will culminate in 2055 nurses being dispatched to all the corners of our province this month, is a testimony to our preparedness to make an impact. Worldwide, more than 330 000 additional midwives are urgently needed. If based in a facility, one midwife can attend up to 220 deliveries per year.

Today, on this occasion, we also want to pay tribute to the work of the midwives who are key healthcare providers in facilities and communities. We recognize their role as they provide essential care before, during and after childbirth and the support, care and advice they give to mothers and their families.

More than thirty years ago the **Alma Ata Declaration** strongly confirmed that we (governments) have a responsibility for the health of our people which can be fulfilled only by the provision of adequate health and social measures. Primary health care including maternal and child care is the key to allow all peoples to lead a socially and economically productive life.

In 2008, the Director-General of WHO, Dr Margaret Chan, launched a renewed call to primary health care. As pointed out in the **National Health Plan for South Africa and the World Health Report of 2008**, the primary health care approach continues to be the most efficient, fair, and cost-effective way to organize a health system. And midwives are an essential element of primary health care and national health systems.

Let us all join forces to make maternal and newborn health a priority – not in paper but in action.

I wish you wisdom in your deliberations in this very important workshop. You have our unwavering support.

I thank you