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CONTACT: Sandra Bunch, ICRW (202) 742-1240; Shanta Bryant Gyan (202) 412-4603

**WORLD BANK SPECIAL SESSION ADDRESSES IMPROVING MATERNAL HEALTH  
TO BOOST ECONOMIC GROWTH**

Session to discuss new ICRW report that recommends investing in maternal health to garner high returns in national economic productivity and lower health care spending

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** Oct. 17, 2007—If world governments collectively invested \$5 billion in maternal health programs, the returns would yield up to three times as much—or \$15 billion in productivity—saving women’s lives, boosting national economies and lowering overall health care spending, according to a new report by the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) that was funded by Family Care International.

The report, entitled “Women Deliver for Development,” will be discussed **Oct. 18** from **8:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.** at a special session on maternal health during the World Bank’s Annual Meetings in Washington, D.C. The special session will be held at the MC Dining Rooms at the World Bank building.

Participants will include **Lord Nigel Crisp**, who authored a report commissioned by former Prime Minister Tony Blair on the U.K. contribution to health in developing countries; **Imogen Sharp** of the U.K. Department of International Development; **Rohini Pande** co-author of the ICRW report, and **Kathy Bushkin Calvin** of UNFPA. Ministers of Finance, top World Bank officials and representatives of the United Nations and nongovernmental organizations will attend the breakfast meeting.

Pregnancy and childbirth complications are the leading causes of death and disability among women of reproductive age in many developing countries, affecting economic productivity and national budgets, the report says. A USAID study estimates the economic impact of maternal and newborn mortality at more than \$15 billion annually in lost productivity, half of which is attributed to women and half to newborns.

The 47-page report recommends that investments in proven maternal health services be scaled up to bolster productivity and achieve the U.N. Millennium Development Goal 5 (MDG 5) of reducing maternal mortality by 75 percent by 2015.

The report cited a World Bank estimate stating that expanding women’s access to interventions addressing complications of pregnancy and childbirth, particularly emergency obstetric care, could prevent nearly 75 percent of maternal deaths.

Despite the evidence demonstrating that interventions can work, the report cautions that a wide gap persists between international assistance allocated for maternal health and the necessary requirements to meet MDG 5.

In 2004, total international development assistance for maternal and newborn health was \$530 million. To achieve MDG 5, the report estimates that between \$4.1 and \$6.1 billion in international assistance would be needed. The overall incremental cost per year is projected to be \$2.1 billion in 2007, increasing each year to \$5.5 billion by 2015. These figures are based on the authors' review of global investments in maternal health over the past two decades.

The \$5.5 billion in international assistance needed for maternal health is only 0.016 percent of total gross national product or 2 percent of total international development assistance, according to the report.

"The money needed to improve the health of mothers and children in the developing world is miniscule compared to other international spending and well within the grasp of donor countries," says ICRW President Geeta Rao Gupta. "Moreover, it's an investment in the futures of these countries that will repay itself ten times over.

"By investing in maternal health, we are investing in women who are in the prime of their lives and have the greatest ability to contribute to their societies and the economy," Rao Gupta says.

The report says that investing resources in maternal health would benefit the overall health service delivery system. Investments in key maternal health facilities can carry over to other types of health services as well, it adds. For example, equipment used for maternity care, such as blood pressure gauges and IV kits, could be used for other clinical interventions. Additionally, the report notes that women who use maternal health services are more likely to access other health services.

The report was first released in the U.K.-based Lancet medical journal in preparation for the Women Deliver global conference on maternal health – entitled "Invest in Women: It Pays!" – which runs Oct. 18-20. The report was funded by Family Care International.

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**The report will be available at the special session and Oct. 18 on the ICRW Web site at [www.icrw.org](http://www.icrw.org). To request an embargoed copy, contact Sandra Bunch at [sbunch@icrw.org](mailto:sbunch@icrw.org) or Shanta Bryant Gyan at [shanta@sbgcommunications.com](mailto:shanta@sbgcommunications.com).**

Press release from the World Bank, "Investing in Women is Smart Economics," visit [http://www.womendeliver.org/pdf/WD\\_101207\\_PressRelease\\_Financial\\_\(A4\).pdf](http://www.womendeliver.org/pdf/WD_101207_PressRelease_Financial_(A4).pdf).

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The International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) is a private nonprofit organization working to improve the lives of women and girls in poverty. ICRW works throughout the world and has offices in India and Uganda.