

Press release

29 November 2011

Britain to provide contraception to save thousands of women's lives

Britain will save the lives of thousands of women by providing urgently needed contraceptive supplies, International Development Minister Stephen O'Brien announced today ahead of the International Conference on Family Planning in Senegal.

Britain's support with these contraceptives will prevent more than 2 million unintended pregnancies and avert nearly 220,000 unsafe abortions, many of which result in life-threatening complications such as severe bleeding and organ damage.

Stephen O'Brien said the funding for the UN's Population Fund (UNFPA) will provide at least 1.6 million implants for women across the developing world so that they can decide for themselves whether, when and how many children to have.

It will ensure women in countries such as Mali, where the prevalence of contraception is only 8% compared with 82% in Britain, receive implants, which are long-acting but reversible methods of birth control.

In addition, Britain is backing a rapid response-style unit which will procure and deliver up to 6 months worth of contraceptive supplies to countries where stocks are running out to give local providers an opportunity to find lasting solutions.

Speaking at the International Conference on Family Planning in Dakar, Senegal, International Development Minister Stephen O'Brien said:

"Millions of unintended pregnancies occur every year because 215 million women who desperately want to delay or avoid pregnancy are unable to do so.

"For many, this amounts to a death sentence with a woman dying in pregnancy or childbirth every two minutes - 99% of them in the developing world.

"Giving girls and women the choice to decide whether, when and how many children they have is a priority for Britain. It means fewer women die in childbirth and the poorest families can make what little they have go further.

"Family planning is a smart, simple and extremely cost effective investment of aid. It is at the centre of all our development work and we are going to ensure more women are given the choices they want and deserve."

Executive Director of UNFPA, Dr Babatunde Osotimehin said:

"UNFPA is grateful for the new commitment by the British Government to increase access to reproductive health services, especially voluntary family planning, worldwide.

"This generous contribution will go a long way towards saving the lives of women and children, as well as to strengthening health systems and reducing poverty. It also demonstrates the British Government's dedication to helping women and young people to forge a brighter future for themselves, their communities and nations."

British support to UNFPA is part of Britain's commitment to enable at least 10 million more women and girls to use modern methods of family planning by 2015 to reduce the unmet need for family planning.

Britain's overall commitment to maternal health will directly contribute to preventing more than 5 million unintended pregnancies and to saving the lives of at least 50,000 women during pregnancy and childbirth and 250,000 newborns by 2015.

Increasing access to quality family planning information, services and supplies directly helps girls and women delay their first pregnancy. Preventing pregnancy in young adolescents makes a particularly significant difference to girls' life chances - allowing them to stay in school and complete their education.

Notes to editors

1. Britain's support to UNFPA will save 3,700 women's lives by preventing more than 2 million unintended pregnancies and averting nearly 220,000 unsafe abortions.

It includes:

- £25m to the Global Programme to Enhance Reproductive Commodity Security (GPRHCS), which will:
Provide at least 1.6 million implants;
Save 2,500 women's lives;
Prevent 1.4 million unintended pregnancies, and;
Avert 150,000 unsafe abortions.
- £10m to the Co-ordinated Assistance for Reproductive Health Supplies Group (CARhs), which will:
Save more than 1,200 women;
Help avoid 650,000 pregnancies, and;
Avert 70,000 unsafe abortions.

2. Family planning is excellent value for money. The relevant services, including the provision of contraception, cost on average under £1 per person per year - far less than treating the complications of an unintended pregnancy or investing in additional services to provide health care and education for a burgeoning population.
3. Minister O'Brien will be part of the official press teleconference launching the International Conference on Family Planning today, November 29, 2011 at 2:30pm GMT. If you would like to participate in the teleconference, please RSVP to adelahoussaye@globalhealthstrategies.com, as space is limited.

Ten minutes before the call begins, dial in to the free number (0-808-101-1183) and identify yourself by providing your name and outlet. Once you are connected, an

operator will ask you for your conference ID. The conference ID is FAMILY PLANNING. The teleconference begins with remarks from five family planning experts, followed by 20 minutes of Q&A. To ask a question, press *1, and the operator will add your name to the queue. When it is your turn to speak, the operator will introduce you, and you can ask your question to the group.

4. The International Conference on Family Planning is the largest ever of its kind. It will bring together experts to share research, best practices, and progress on national strategies to deliver family planning services, with the ultimate goal being universal access to family planning.

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