



International Confederation of Midwives

PRESS RELEASE

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Midwives at ICM Council deplore the effect of debt payments on maternal and child health in developing countries and call for debt cancellation

The Gambia Midwives Association has presented a position statement on global economic policies to the delegates from 60 midwifery associations in 50 countries who have assembled in Vienna for the ICM's International Council meeting.

The midwife representatives voted by an overwhelming majority to endorse a statement that:

'ICM recognises and deplores the negative impact that payment of debts is having on maternal and child health and health care in many developing countries. It calls for the complete cancellation of debt owed by the 52 most heavily indebted countries as an important part of wider economic reform'.

Particularly severe effects for women and children were listed as:

- Reduced public expenditure on services such as health and education
- Reduced subsidies on food
- Less access to free or cheap health care including family planning
- Greater pressure on women to work outside the home, restricting their ability to provide appropriate childcare and breastfeeding

The rationale behind the statement describes action by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, which has aimed to improve management of the loans but been insufficient to solve the problem. It is important to note that debt cancellation in isolation will not lead to a permanent reduction in poverty and the associated impact on health caused by poor nutrition and living conditions. What is needed is a fundamental change in the economic order, particularly in the way that world trade operates.

The representative from the Canadian Association of Midwives, in seconding the motion, described it as a 'timely and well presented paper on a complex issue'. She urged ICM to take action at global level by meeting not only with health-related agencies such as WHO but also with the World Bank and those with influence in the economic field.

Midwives from the Colegio de Matronas de Chile (Chilean College of Midwives) and the Iran Midwifery Population strongly supported the adoption of the statement, referring to conditions in their own countries. The midwife from Chile pointed out that when state-funded health services are negatively affected by national economic factors, those who can afford it use private health care but this only increases the inequality gap between the few rich and the many poor.

This ICM Council meeting precedes the 26th Triennial Congress (April 14-18) when 2,500 midwives will gather in Vienna to participate in a diverse and multilingual programme of lectures, workshops, poster sessions and other presentations.

The ICM is a Confederation of 83 national midwifery associations, founded in 1919, and aims to 'advance world-wide the aims and aspirations of midwives in the attainment of improved outcomes for women in their childbearing years, their newborn and their families wherever they reside'.

For further information contact ICM headquarters or visit the website www.internationalmidwives.org