



International Confederation of Midwives

PRESS RELEASE

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Delegates at ICM Council overwhelmingly support positive action on 'Midwives, Women and Human Rights'

Representatives from 60 national midwifery associations in 50 countries have debated the adoption of a new position statement on women, their human rights and the midwife's role in helping them to understand and claim these rights.

The proposal, drafted by members of the ICM Board of Management, makes reference to many international documents including the UN's Universal Declaration on Human Rights 1948; the UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women 1979; the International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo 1994; the 4th World Conference on Women held in Beijing 1995; and particularly the revised version of the ICM International Code of Ethics for Midwives, which states 'Midwives understand the adverse consequences that ethical and human rights violations have on the health of women and infants, and will work to eliminate these violations'.

The current proposed statement, among other things, requires that:

- Midwives work towards the empowerment of women so that they can make informed choices that may significantly affect their health and the health of their families
- Midwives and women acquire the knowledge, skill and desire to achieve autonomy in decisions that affect their own vital interests and the interests of their families
- Midwives, in their work with women, families and advocacy groups, provide support and appropriate information for making informed decisions.

An addition to the statement was put forward by a group of delegates including the Swedish Association of Midwives, the Federation of Finnish Midwives, the Danish Association of Midwives, the Norwegian Association of Midwives and the Midwifery Section of the Norwegian Nurses' Association. This group said it was unacceptable that, in times of war and civil unrest, the civilian population is refused access to vital medical treatment and health personnel are prevented from reaching those who need their services. They called for the Confederation to reinforce that it is 'crucial that the 4th Geneva Convention is respected and the obligations in the convention always fulfilled'.

Representatives from the Hellenic Midwives Association, the Colegio de Matronas de Chile (Chilean College of Midwives) and the Colegio de Obstétricas de la Provincia de Buenos Aires (Argentina College of Midwives) all spoke of personal or professional experiences where they or women they were caring for had suffered violations of human rights. These delegates asked for positive action on this matter in ICM's relations with the UN.

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 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