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PRESS RELEASE

Minister Fatimi Opens Afghan Midwives Association Annual Congress

Kabul, Afghanistan | May 4, 2008 — Minister of Public Health Dr. Sayed Amin Fatimi opened the Afghan Midwives Association (AMA) 4th Annual Congress on May 3, 2008, in Kabul. After remarks by Deputy Minister of Women's Affairs Palwasha Kakar, over 450 attendees from throughout Afghanistan assessed the progress the AMA has made since its inception in 2005.

Afghanistan has the second highest maternal mortality rate in the world estimated at 1,600 maternal deaths for every 100,000 live births; every 27 minutes a woman dies from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth. The use of midwives as skilled birth attendants is known to have an impact in reducing maternal mortality. The Ministry of Public Health aims to reduce maternal and newborn deaths by increasing the number of midwives, particularly to rural areas of Afghanistan.

AMA works with the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to promote the skills of midwives and to ensure that midwives are part of the policy development process. AMA also fosters systems of care that promote excellence and accountability in midwifery practice. All of these elements translate into providing safe quality health care for mothers and babies.

AMA, formed in 2005 with support from USAID, is internationally recognized as a member of the International Confederation of Midwives. The AMA now boasts a membership of 1,100 which continues to grow as new midwives graduate from the national midwifery programs and awareness of the association spreads in the provinces.

According to Dr. Jatinder Cheema, Deputy Director of USAID/Afghanistan, "Deployment of midwives, particularly to remote areas of the country, is essential if women and their babies are to receive skilled care. You have my assurance that USAID is committed to working with the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to reduce the high infant and maternal mortality in this country."

This yearly meeting provides an opportunity for midwives to update their professional skills and knowledge and learn from each other by sharing experiences. Awards recognizing midwives who have made an outstanding contribution to the profession will be distributed. The meeting will end with the celebration of International Day of the Midwife on May 5 where midwives all over the world will join celebrate the work of midwives, with the theme "*Midwives help to build healthy families – in the midwives' hands is the key to the future*".

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