Press Release

Pregnant Women and Newborns are Unseen Victims of Gaza Conflict, Warns UNFPA

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**New York/Jerusalem**—Continuing violence and displacement present serious risks to more than 40,000 pregnant women in Gaza, warned UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund. Lack of access to critical health services, including emergency obstetric care, could mean the difference between life and death for many of them and their babies.

Each day in Gaza, some 170 women give birth. Because of ongoing military operations, most of these women are unable to leave their homes or shelters to access maternity care facilities or delivery services, putting their lives and the lives of their babies at risk. Even those who can make it to a hospital may not be able to receive proper care, as many delivery wards have been turned into surgical facilities to treat the wounded.

“Pregnant women and their newborn babies are some of the unseen victims of the current crisis in Gaza,” said UNFPA Executive Director Thoraya Ahmed Obaid. “Without attention to their special needs, including safe access to proper care and nutrition, many of them could suffer from silent deaths and injuries that are easily preventable under normal conditions.”

In the best of circumstances, hundreds of pregnant women require care by qualified health providers every day in Gaza, and an average of 30 women undergo Caesarean section—a procedure not readily available because of the conflict. Stress, trauma and poor nutrition could also result in life-threatening complications for the estimated 41,000 women who are likely to be pregnant at any time in Gaza.

UNFPA is alarmed by reports of premature labour and delivery resulting from shock and trauma from continuous bombing, and the exposure of premature and newborn infants to hypothermia due to the lack of electricity. This risk is augmented by the lack of warm clothing or blankets among the increasing number of displaced people.

Working with United Nations agencies, including UNRWA and other partners, UNFPA has delivered medicine and surgical instruments to Gaza’s hospitals, as well as hygiene products, blankets and first aid supplies to families in Gaza. However, much more is still needed to address the serious humanitarian crisis. UNFPA joins the United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in calling for an immediate ceasefire and for the protection of the vulnerable population, particularly women and children. It also appeals for the opening of all crossings to allow humanitarian aid to reach those who are most impacted by the military action.