

## **Greater efforts required to ensure China's maternal health, UN**

BEIJING, March 25 -- China's maternal mortality ratio is on track but greater efforts are required to ensure the ratio is further reduced, said the United Nations in a report issued here Thursday.

The report, which is a UN assessment of China's progress on the Millennium Development Goals, said China's maternal mortality ratio has dropped from 89 per 100,000 live births in 1990 to 50 in 2001. The proportion of births attended by skilled health workers in hospital increased from 51 percent in 1990 to 76 percent in 2001.

According to the report, China's Millennium Development Goal for maternal health is to reduce maternal mortality ratio by three-quarters from 1990 to 2015.

The Millennium Development Goals originated at the Millennium Summit held at the headquarters of the United Nations in September 2000, when heads of state and government from over 100 UN member countries adopted the Millennium Declaration, making a commitment to meet the goals by the end of 2015.

The report said during 2000-2001, China initiated a Safe Motherhood program to decrease maternal mortality in western regions with a 200 million yuan (24.2 million US dollars) investment by central and local governments, reducing maternal mortality rates in 378 program counties by 29 percent.

"The current policies of support for improving safe delivery rates in western China, increased contraceptive use, and declining birth rates in poor areas will have a positive impact on maternal mortality," said the report.

Meanwhile, the report pointed out that China's national figures mask the great contrast between eastern and western provinces.

In eastern provinces and major cities, economic growth has led to improved medical services for women and good access to Emergency Obstetric Care (EOC). This in turn, has resulted in developed-country levels of contraceptive prevalence rates and maternal mortality ratios. But in remote parts of China's western provinces, women have limited access to EOC and usually deliver at home with no skilled health worker present, the report said.

In addition, the report said the chronic under-funding of public health services and deteriorating health systems in China's rural areas has aroused concerns that further reducing the maternal mortality rates might not be achieved.

According to the report, a 1998 National Health Survey revealed that 63 percent of cases referred to hospital did not attend due to financial reasons. National health accounts data show that government expenditure has dropped from 25 percent of total health expenditure in 1990 to 15 percent in 1999.

"A major challenge is to reduce the great differences between the eastern and western provinces," the report said, adding that this will require health support to the poorer provinces.

From *Xinhuanet*