DEMAND DIGNITY
MATERNAL MORTALITY: PERU

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL
Aotearoa New Zealand

DENIED THE RIGHT TO MATERNAL HEALTHCARE

As part of the 'Demand Dignity' campaign Amnesty International Aotearoa New Zealand is focusing on the issue of preventable maternal mortality.

More than half a million women die needlessly each year from complications related to pregnancy and childbirth. That is the equivalent of one women every minute. Most of these deaths could have been prevented by high—quality accessible, affordable and timely medical care.

The lack of proper investment, the unequal distribution of health resources and unequal access to health care in Peru result in one of the highest mother and infant mortality rates in the Americas. This situation affects the rural poor and indigenous women in particular. If there is clear political will, adequate funding and appropriate services, these deaths are preventable.

According to the World Health Organization, 410 out of every 100,000 who gave birth died during labour in 2004. That's one woman every eight hours. This figure is surpassed only by Haiti and Bolivia – the poorest countries in the Americas. Most of these deaths could be prevented with adequate health care.

The Seguro Integral de Salud (SIS), a health scheme introduced in 2002, should provide free maternal and infant health services for those who cannot afford to pay. In areas where levels of poverty are high the whole community is entitled to free medical care. However, the reality is that despite the scheme, many women, especially in poor rural areas, are still not able to access adequate health care. People wanting to register for free medical treatment under the SIS have to fill in a complex questionnaire and, in urban areas, there are often long delays while social workers verify the information given.

Discrimination is a major factor preventing women from poor and marginalized communities from accessing health services. In many cases, discrimination on the basis of a person's economic status is reinforced by discrimination on the basis of cultural or ethnic identity. Many of the women interviewed by Amnesty International described how they had been treated dismissively or even abusively in health centres because they were poor or from Indigenous communities.

Women queuing outside a health centre in rural Huancavelica, Peru, 26 September 2008. Maternal mortality rates in Peru are among the worst in the region. They are disproportionately high among the country's poor and indigenous rural communities.

"Every eight hours a woman dies in Peru as a result of pregnancy or because of complications during labour. Forty-five per cent of deaths in the country are of children under five."

Hacia una reforma sanitaria por el derecho a la salud, II National Health Conference, 2004

Most of the health centres visited by AI lacked information about rights to health care, and both users and staff were often unaware of women's entitlements. As a result, poor women and children are not able to access the services which should be available to them. Some health centres impose illegal fines on families if children are born at home or if mothers do not attend prenatal clinics.

Caption: Women queuing outside a health centre in rural Huancavelica, Peru, 26 September 2008

TAKE ACTION

Amnesty International is calling on the government to take urgent steps to address obstacles, deeply rooted in discrimination, which prevent poor and marginalized communities from accessing health services.

Please write to the Government of Peru, urging them to:

- ensure that clear information about free health services through the SIS is made available in appropriate languages and formats and is distributed to all health facilities serving low-income families;
- review and simplify the procedures for identifying and registering those entitled to free health services to avoid unnecessary delays during the registration process;
- ensure that health centres and health professionals do not impose illegal fines on women who give birth at home, and that certificates of live birth are issued for all newborns without charge, whether or not the baby was born in a health facility or at home and regardless of whether the mother attended prenatal and postnatal check-ups;
- ensure health workers at all levels receive training enabling them to meet the health needs of women and children from poor and marginalized communities;
- promote the participation of communities in decisions about the kind of health services which they need and want and ensure that the services provided are appropriate to their cultural practices.

WRITE TO:

Oscar Raúl Ugarte Ubilluz
Ministro de Salud, Ministerio de Salud
Av. Salaverry 801
Jesús María
Lima
PERÚ

Salutation: Dear Minister

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AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL
Aotearoa New Zealand

Amnesty International is a global movement of 2.2 million people in more than 150 countries and territories who campaign to end grave abuses of human rights.

Our vision is for every person to enjoy all the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards.

We are independent of any government, political ideology, economic interest or religion – funded mainly by our membership and public donations.