

UNITED NATIONS



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**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

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**MESSAGE ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF FAMILIES**

**15 May 2009**

This year's International Day of Families, being commemorated under the theme, "Mothers and Families: Challenges in a Changing World," focuses on the important role of mothers for families and communities around the world.

Mothers play a critical role in the family, which is a powerful force for social cohesion and integration. The mother-child relationship is vital for the healthy development of children. And mothers are not only caregivers; they are also breadwinners for their families. Yet women continue to face major – and even life-threatening – challenges in motherhood.

Childbirth, which should be a cause for celebration, is a grave health risk for too many women in developing countries. Improving maternal health is the Millennium Development Goal on which the least progress has been made. A woman in a least-developed country is 300 times more likely to die in childbirth or from pregnancy-related complications than a woman in a developed country. We must make pregnancy and childbirth safer by enabling health systems to provide family planning, skilled attendance at birth and emergency obstetric care.

Violence against women, many of whom are mothers, remains one of the most pervasive human rights violations of our time. It has far-reaching consequences – endangering the lives of women and girls, harming their families and communities, and damaging the very fabric of societies. Ending and preventing violence against women should be a key priority for all countries.

We must also ensure universal access to education. The benefits of educating women and girls accrue not only to individual families but to whole countries, unlocking the potential of women to contribute to broader development efforts. Statistics also show that educated mothers are much more likely to keep their children in school, meaning that the benefits of education transcend generations.

As we strive to support mothers in their caregiving work, we should develop and expand family-friendly policies and services, such as child care centres, that would reduce some of the workload placed on women. Women and men alike need stronger public support to share equally in work and family responsibilities. Families built on the recognition of equality between women and men will contribute to more stable and productive societies.

We face multiple challenges in our changing world, but one factor remains constant: the timeless importance of mothers and their invaluable contribution to raising the next generation. By rewarding their efforts and enhancing their living conditions, we can secure a better future for all.