

## Statement by UNFPA Executive Director Dr. Natalia Kanem on World Health Day 2023

Every two minutes, a woman dies giving birth. As the clock counts down another year, 287,000 more women will meet the same tragic fate.

Most of these deaths are preventable. They are not inevitable. They happen because health-care systems routinely fail women and girls.

Women die giving birth because, for too many, health services are unavailable, inaccessible, unaffordable or offer poor quality care.

Women seeking contraception face similar barriers. An estimated 257 million women who want to avoid pregnancy are not using safe and modern methods to do so.

This year's World Health Day is a moment to join the global call of "health for all".

For decades, health care systems around the world have made progress in improving the reach and quality of sexual and reproductive health care. UNFPA has supported that effort. The contraceptives UNFPA procured in 2021 alone helped to prevent 39,000 maternal deaths – contributing to a long and steady decline in the global number of women dying in childbirth.

Today, alarmingly, we see that global progress has stalled. In some places, maternal death rates are even increasing.

One reason may be that, particularly amid the COVID-19 pandemic, decisions were made to deprioritize and cut funds for essential, life-saving sexual and reproductive health services.

Gender discrimination often drives such decisions, treating the health and well-being of women and girls as less important than other goals.

As part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, countries around the world have committed to achieving universal health coverage and universal access to sexual and reproductive health.

Even so, in most countries, universal health coverage benefits packages exclude many essential sexual and reproductive health interventions, including measures related to reproductive cancers and gender-based violence prevention and response.

Around the world, UNFPA is supporting health systems to provide quality sexual and reproductive health services that reach every person and accommodate diverse population groups, including people with disabilities.

Investing in sexual and reproductive health is an essential investment in sustainable development and in delivering a world where every woman, girl and young person can live up to their full potential.

Such investments not only save and improve lives, they generate economic gains too: By UNFPA's calculation, investing a single dollar in ending preventable maternal deaths and the unmet need for family planning by 2030 can yield economic benefits of up to \$8.40 by 2050.

On this World Health Day, let us uphold the right of all people to reach the highest possible standard of health. Let us join forces to expand access to sexual and reproductive health, with rights and choices as the path to a more equal, prosperous and sustainable future.