



September 16, 2011

Dear Secretary Sebelius:

More than 5,000 midwives from 76 countries, including the United States, have signed a petition calling on leaders everywhere to show bold leadership and put midwives and other health workers at the heart of efforts to improve the health of mothers and their children.

When world leaders meet at the UN General Assembly this September to measure progress on the global strategy for women and children's health, we are calling on them to take action and strengthen or increase their commitment to the education, recruitment and retention of midwives and health workers around the world.

As midwives ourselves, we know how crucial it is that a woman has expert care when she is pregnant and the vital role that midwives and health workers play in ensuring that a newborn baby survives its first month of life. Midwives are essential for reducing maternal, newborn and child mortality and together with other health workers, address the full spectrum of health challenges that a person will face during their lifetime.

However, there are not enough midwives in the world and this global shortage means that thousands of mothers and newborn babies die every day unnecessarily.

Globally, one in three pregnant women gives birth without a midwife or a skilled birth attendant and one in seven children in the poorest countries lacks access to essential health care. It is the poorest and most vulnerable women and children who are least likely to have access to a midwife or health worker.

At the UN General Assembly later this month we need to see concrete action from all governments to ensure that there are enough midwives, with the right skills and in the right places, supported by an effective health worker team.

We urge you to use the General Assembly to outline how the United States will help the poorest countries strengthen their health workforce as part of your commitment to women and children.

We wish you all the best for the General Assembly and look forward to hearing how the United States will contribute to the global effort to ensure there is a health worker in reach of every woman and every child.

Sincerely,

Holly Powell Kennedy, CNM, PhD, FACNM, FAAN  
President, American College of Nurse-Midwives