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Midwives demand global birth reform *Midwifery Today's "Birth Is a Human Rights Issue" conference will kick off movement in Strasbourg, France, Sept. 29, 2010 – Oct. 3, 2010*

According to the World Health Organization, 1,500 women die from complications related to pregnancy or childbirth every single day. Most of these deaths are avoidable.

“Most births around the world lead to preventable traumas for the mother and baby,” says Jan Tritten, founding editor of *Midwifery Today* magazine. “We call such traumas preventable because many of them are iatrogenic, caused by unnecessary and scientifically unjustifiable interventions performed by hospital staff who do not understand how to properly facilitate the normal physiology of birth.”

In June of 2009, the United Nations Human Rights Council adopted a landmark resolution acknowledging maternal mortality and morbidity as a human rights issue. An encouraging first step, Tritten says, but until the world recognizes pregnancy and childbirth as a natural, physiological process, rather than an “illness” to be treated medically, mothers will continue to die unnecessarily.

“The effects of medicalized practices on maternal and perinatal mortality and morbidity remain widely underestimated and ignored,” Tritten says. “In hundreds of thousands of cases, if the mother, baby and birthing process were treated with respectful, evidence-based care, these types of traumas would never take place and birth outcomes would be significantly improved.”

Tritten, a midwife and longtime advocate for a return to traditional midwifery practices, says birth should be considered a crucial and urgent human rights issue. She hopes to take this issue to the United Nations and the world.

“Fundamental medical misunderstandings of the normal physiology and psychology of birth are causing mothers and babies to miss out on the healthiest possible beginning,” Tritten says. “Their human rights to birth naturally and without intervention are being violated.”

Tritten, who has been educating birth professionals for more than two decades, says birth practitioners worldwide should begin promoting optimal birth such as those put forth in the International Motherbaby Childbirth Initiative (available at www.imbci.org/ShowPage.asp?id=209).

Prompted to action by the United Nations' recent resolution, Tritten is taking this issue to the international community. At Midwifery Today's upcoming conference in Strasbourg, France—the seat of the European Court of Human Rights as well as the European Parliament—Tritten and birth professionals from around the world will thoroughly examine these issues and make plans to replace current, harmful birth practices with more supportive, evidence-based care.

“Pregnancy and birth are the most crucial and powerful passages in a woman's life,” Tritten says. “And every mother and baby has the right to be treated with reverence and respect during the birth process, including pregnancy and beyond. We must commit to an optimal birth for every mother and baby.”

For more information about the upcoming “Birth Is a Human Rights Issue” conference, visit Midwifery Today's Web site at www.midwiferytoday.com/conferences/Strasbourg2010/.

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