

# Harper heralds maternal health's rosy future as UN meeting opens <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

A \$40-billion initiative on maternal and child health will create a "wave of hope" across the developing world, Prime Minister Stephen Harper predicted Wednesday as he opened a United Nations meeting.

Mr. Harper, the co-chairman of a UN commission overseeing how the maternal health dollars are collected and spent, gave an upbeat assessment of the job ahead as he pursues the maternal health program he spearheaded at the G8 in Muskoka last summer.

"This is about the future, the future of families, of communities, countries and indeed ultimately of humanity," Mr. Harper said in his opening remarks.

"Improvements to the health, education and living conditions of millions of women and children will mean a wave of hope that will ripple through the developing world."

The Prime Minister led a session Wednesday on the commission's efforts to ensure donor countries actually make good on their pledges, as well as a session on outreach to stakeholders.

Mr. Harper's co-chair, Tanzanian President Jakaya Kikwete, headed up sessions on accounting for the results of the maternal health spending.

Mr. Kikwete offered a far more sobering address to the 25 commissioners on the panel. He noted that of the eight millennium development goals set by the UN for 2015, "the ones on maternal and child health are lagging far behind target."

Citing what he called "staggering statistics," Mr. Kikwete said that although Africa has just 12 per cent of the global population, it accounts for half of all maternal deaths and half the deaths of children under five. The numbers, he said, offer "a stark reminder of the enormity of the challenge."

The meeting Wednesday was essentially a steering committee, after which two working groups of technical experts will map out an accountability framework that will then have to be sold to donor countries, recipients, and civil society groups. The framework is to be completed by May.

Mr. Harper also met with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon before the commission formally got under way at the World Health Organization headquarters.

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- reprinted from the Globe & Mail

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statistics <sup>[4]</sup>

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