

## JOINT STATEMENT

### On International Day to End Obstetric Fistula - 23 May, the African Union Commission Highlights Key Interventions to End Fistula within a Generation



#### What is Obstetric Fistula?

Fistula is a childbirth injury (a hole in the birth canal) caused by prolonged obstructed labor, the lack of access to proper and prompt medical intervention, leaving the woman with chronic incontinence and in most cases a stillborn baby. The smell of leaking urine, faeces or both, is constant and humiliating, often driving the patients' family, friends and neighbors away. If left untreated, fistula can lead to chronic medical problems including ulcerations, kidney disease, and nerve damage in the legs.

#### The devastation of obstetric fistula for women and girls in Africa

The United Nations estimates that at least two million women live with fistula in developing countries, with 50,000 to 100,000 new cases occurring each year and these numbers represent only those seeking treatment. Women and girls in Africa, south of the Sahara, are mostly affected by fistula as well as other illness from sexual and reproductive health causes.

The tragic mix of young girls being subjected to child marriages, getting pregnant and going through childbirth when their bodies are not developed enough accounts for at least 25% of known fistula cases. Evidence shows that 14 of the 20 countries with the highest rate of child marriage are in Africa.

***"I have been dead for 30 years, but today I will start living again."***

- Heartbreaking words of Susan Nyambura, 53, as she waited for her turn to go into theatre for a fistula repair operation at Coast General Hospital in Mombasa, Kenya.

***"I still have nightmares when I remember how I used to smell back then"***

- Micheline Yotoudjim, a Chadian girl, married off at age 14, became pregnant at 16, and then experienced a prolonged, obstructed labor. Her baby was eventually delivered through a Caesarean section, but died four days later.

In its resolution **A/RES/67/147**, the UN General Assembly calls on the International Community to use the International Day to significantly raise awareness and intensify actions towards ending obstetric fistula.

### **Prevention is Key to Ending Obstetric fistula**

The average cost of fistula treatment is US\$400, that cannot be afforded by most women with the condition, however, these key strategies, will help end fistula:

- Providing access to adequate medical care for all pregnant women.
- Providing emergency obstetric care for those who develop complications.
- Increasing access to education and family planning services for women and men.
- Postponing pregnancy for young girls until they are physically mature and ending child marriages.
- Improving girls' nutrition to minimize the risk of complications during childbirth.
- Repairing physical and emotional damages through specialized interventions.

#####

This is a joint message by the **African Union's Department of Social Affairs** and the **Directorate of Women, Gender and Development**. All data and strategies referenced here are from the [Campaign to End Fistula](#), led by UNFPA.