



WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

NOTE FOR THE PRESS

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GREAT EXPECTATIONS

SIX WOMEN TELL THEIR STORIES OF PREGNANCY AND CHILDBIRTH

A NEW PHOTO REPORTAGE FROM THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION www.who.int

Geneva - In a unique photo reportage, six women from countries around the world are telling their stories of pregnancy and childbirth, through a new World Health Organization (WHO) web feature.

From now, in their fifth month of pregnancy, until their babies are six weeks old, these women will narrate the details of how their pregnancies are progressing, and, after they are born, how their babies are growing. Their stories are part of a global effort to ensure that women give birth safely to healthy children, in a world where over half a million women die in pregnancy and childbirth annually, and nearly 11 million children do not reach their fifth birthdays.

The reportage, called "Great expectations" will continue in the months leading up to World Health Day 2005, 7 April, 2005, which will highlight issues of maternal and child health.

The six women are sharing the same experience of pregnancy and childbirth, but in very different circumstances. They live with their families in six countries - Bolivia, Egypt, Ethiopia, India, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, and the United Kingdom. The six women are Damiana Mamani, 29, Samah Mohamed, 26, Hiwot Tadesse Abraham, 17, Renu Sharma, 24, Bounlid, 27 and Claire Roche, 29.

"I am very keen to be involved in such a worthwhile project. I was shocked to learn that in some countries pregnancy and childbirth can be such a dangerous time for some women," said Claire Roche, from the UK. "In the first five months of my pregnancy I've had several ultrasound scans while both Renu and Bounlid have had no antenatal care at all."

"I worry about emergencies," says Bounlid, who lives in Vientiane province, Laos PDR, as she considers delivery day. "There are several tractors and tok toks in the village and I hope that someone would drive me to the nearest clinic if there was a problem."

WHO has just published part one of "Great expectations", which introduces the women and their families at five months into their pregnancies. These women will report back again at seven months, at the birth of the babies, when their newborns are one week old, and finally when the babies are six weeks old.

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"I salute these women, for giving us all a glimpse into the joys and the drama of pregnancy and childbirth. Their stories highlight what we know instinctively - that every mother must be able to give birth safely, and that every newborn needs the best chance to live a healthy life," said Joy Phumaphi, Assistant Director-General of Family and Community Health at WHO.

The theme of World Health Day 2005 is maternal and child health. Four years ago, at the Millennium Summit in New York, world leaders from 189 countries pledged to reduce the maternal mortality ratio by three quarters, and to reduce the under five mortality rate by two thirds, between 1990 and 2015. At present, the international community is a long way from reaching these targets.

For further information please contact Rebecca Harding, Communications Officer, Department of Reproductive Health and Research, Tel: + 41 22 791 3229; mobile: +41 79 509 0651; email: hardingr@who.int

For more information about Great Expectations, please go to:
http://www.who.int/features/2004/great_expectations/en/

All WHO Press Releases, Fact Sheets and Features as well as other information on this subject can be obtained on the Internet on the WHO home page www.who.int