NEWS RELEASE

International Initiative on Maternal Mortality and Human Rights Unveiled

London, 19 October 2007 – Today, leading safe motherhood and human rights organisations from around the world convened at the Women Deliver Global Conference to announce a groundbreaking collaboration aimed at addressing maternal mortality as a human rights imperative. The *International Initiative on Maternal Mortality and Human Rights* represents a renewed commitment to women, and their human right to safe pregnancy and childbirth.

"When pregnant women die, all too often it is because adequate and equitable health services simply aren't available to them," said Nancy Northup, president of the Center for Reproductive Rights, the global legal advocacy organization that is hosting the Initiative. "Governments are obligated to provide pregnancy-related care in a way that respects the dignity of women and families, as well as the human rights principles of non-discrimination, equity, transparency, and participation."

This Initiative aims to reduce maternal mortality by:

- Holding governments accountable for implementing effective and equitable policies and programs.
- Securing increased resources at the global and national levels.
- Promoting understanding among, and providing expertise to, key stakeholders on addressing maternal mortality as a human rights issue.

"The scale of avoidable maternal mortality is a human rights catastrophe," said Lynn Freedman, director of the Averting Maternal Death and Disability (AMDD) program at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health. "There are over 500,000 maternal deaths worldwide each year that are largely avoidable. In most cases, these amount to violations of women's rights to life, health, non-discrimination and equality."

The *International Initiative on Maternal Mortality and Human Rights* was founded by the AMDD program at Columbia University, CARE, the Center for Reproductive Rights, Family Care International, and the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to the highest attainable standard of health, Paul Hunt.

"This Initiative is unique," says Paul Hunt. "Never before have such diverse organisations with different perspectives joined together to use human rights in the struggle against maternal mortality. The Initiative reflects the growing maturity of the health and human rights movement. It is an Initiative of the twenty-first century."

For further information, please contact:

London Contacts:
Morgan Stoffregen
Center for Reproductive Rights
mstoffregen@reprorights.org
Tel. +44.773.667.1401

Paul Hunt
United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health
Tel. +44.078.28.64.8271

U.S. Contact:
Dionne Scott
Center for Reproductive Rights
dscott@reprorights.org
Tel. +1.917.637.3649