

Imbruglia campaigns against pregnancy disease

Wed Jun 28, 2006 11:38 PM ET

By Patricia Reaney

LONDON (Reuters) - A few years ago Natalie Imbruglia had never heard of obstetric fistula. Now the singer-songwriter is on a mission to help prevent a crippling childbirth injury that affects at least 2 million women.

During two trips to Africa, the Australian-born entertainer and actress saw first-hand how devastating one of the world's worst pregnancy disabilities can be for women.

After agonizing days in labor without medical assistance women in developing countries suffer tissue damage, lose their babies and are left with chronic incontinence. Often they are ostracized by their husband, family and community.

"It just should not be happening, that women cannot safely have a child in this day and age," Imbruglia said in an interview. "How can you not be compelled to want to draw attention to this issue?"

"If you could help just one of these women, to me, it is literally giving that woman her life back. That is how I think about it," said the 31-year-old who shot to fame in the Australian soap opera "Neighbors" in the early 1990s.

Imbruglia is working with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) which launched the first global campaign in 2003 to end fistula.

The condition can be prevented with skilled obstetric care and 90 percent of cases can be treated with simple surgery. The campaign aims to prevent fistula through education and to treat affected women and support them after surgery.

Imbruglia took time out from working on a new album and before starting a film in Australia to launch a fistula awareness and fund-raising campaign in Britain, where the condition was eliminated a century ago.

The campaign will appear on television, in newspapers, magazines and on the Underground rail network.

She is among a growing number of celebrities, including the rock star Bono of U2, Bob Geldof and the actress Angelina Jolie, who are using their fame to publicize the suffering of the world's poor.

"They need a voice," she said. "Nobody wants to talk about being incontinent. These women are suffering in silence. It is shameful for them -- you can see it in their faces."

Reuters/VNU

© Reuters 2006. All rights reserved. Republication or redistribution of Reuters content, including by caching, framing or similar means, is expressly prohibited without the prior written consent of Reuters. Reuters and the Reuters sphere logo are registered trademarks and trademarks of the Reuters group of companies around the world.

Close This Window