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“Fistula Fortnight” to Treat Hundreds of Fistula Patients in Nigeria

WHAT: Volunteer doctors from the United Kingdom and the United States will join forces with a team of Nigerian surgeons this month to treat hundreds of women suffering from obstetric fistula and train in fistula surgery. During this “Fistula Fortnight” event, an unprecedented number of women will be treated over a two-week period in a country with one of the highest fistula prevalence rates in Africa. Studies indicate that between 400,000 and 800,000 Nigerian women are living with fistula, with an estimated 20,000 new cases each year. The problem is particularly severe in the country’s northern states. To learn more, visit www.endfistula.org

WHO: The two-week pilot project is the result of a unique partnership between UNFPA (the United Nations Population Fund), Federal and State governments of Nigeria, Virgin Unite, the Nigerian Red Cross, VSO (Voluntary Service Overseas), health professionals and local non-governmental organizations.

WHEN: 21 February – 6 March 2005

WHERE: The “Fistula Fortnight” will take place at four hospitals in northern Nigeria. A launch event is scheduled for 10:00 on 21 February at the Babbar Ruga Hospital in Katsina. Sir Richard Branson, head of the Virgin Group, is scheduled to attend the launch.

WHY: Obstetric fistula is a preventable and treatable condition. Yet too many women in developing countries remain untreated. Visibility surrounding the event will help spread the word that treatment is available and break the silence and stigma associated with the condition.

FAST FACTS:

- Obstetric fistula is a devastating childbirth injury that occurs when a woman endures obstructed labour – often for several days – without medical intervention. In nearly all cases, the baby dies and the woman is left with chronic incontinence. The woman is often abandoned by her husband, ostracized by her community, and blamed for her condition.
- At least two million women are living with fistula and 50,000 to 100,000 new cases occur each year, according to the World Health Organization. These figures are based on the number of women seeking treatment and are likely to be gross underestimates.

- In Nigeria, one woman in 18 will die from complications of childbirth – a stark contrast to Europe, where the figure is one in 2,400.
- Once common throughout the world, fistula all but disappeared in Europe and North America more than 100 years ago through improved obstetric care.
- The “Fistula Fortnight” is part of a global Campaign to End Fistula, launched by UNFPA in 2003. The Campaign is active in more than 30 countries in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and the Arab States and involves a wide range of partners.

UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, is the world’s largest multilateral source of population assistance. Since it became operational in 1969, the Fund has provided substantial assistance to developing countries, at their request, to address their population and development needs. Making motherhood safer for all women is at the heart of UNFPA’s mandate.

To learn more about the Campaign to End Fistula, visit www.endfistula.org