

108TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. RES. 447

Recognizing the horrific effects of obstetric fistulas and urging that programs be initiated to prevent and treat obstetric fistulas.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

NOVEMBER 18, 2003

Mr. TOWNS (for himself, Ms. NORTON, Mrs. CHRISTENSEN, Ms. LEE, Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas, Mr. LANTOS, Mr. WAXMAN, Ms. SCHAKOWSKY, Mr. OWENS, Mr. BISHOP of Georgia, and Mr. SCOTT of Georgia) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Energy and Commerce, and in addition to the Committee on International Relations, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned

RESOLUTION

Recognizing the horrific effects of obstetric fistulas and urging that programs be initiated to prevent and treat obstetric fistulas.

Whereas each minute a woman dies from pregnancy-related complications;

Whereas for every woman who dies from pregnancy-related complications, between 15 to 30 live but suffer chronic disabilities, the worst of which are obstetric fistulas;

Whereas between 1,000,000 and 3,000,000 women are estimated to suffer from obstetric fistulas worldwide;

Whereas obstetric fistulas usually occur in young, first-time mothers;

Whereas although currently virtually unknown in the Western World, obstetric fistulas were once common in the United States and Europe before the advent of widespread maternal health care and hospital births;

Whereas obstetric fistulas occur when a woman is in obstructed and prolonged labor without medical help;

Whereas the prolonged pressure of the baby's head against the mother's pelvis cuts off the blood supply to the soft tissues surrounding her bladder, rectum, and vagina;

Whereas the prolonged and difficult labor that causes obstetric fistulas usually results in the death of the baby;

Whereas if the mother survives such prolonged labor the injured tissue will rot away leaving a perforation, or fistula, which causes the woman to lose control of urination and bowel function;

Whereas because of a lack of understanding about the cause and treatment of obstetric fistulas, women who suffer from obstetric fistulas are often abandoned by their husbands, forced out of their homes, and ostracized by their families;

Whereas a recent report commissioned by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) titled "Obstetric Fistula Needs Assessment: Findings from Nine African Countries" details obstetric fistula occurrence in nine countries in sub-Saharan Africa: Benin, Chad, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Uganda, and Zambia;

Whereas 35 hospitals in such countries have the capacity to conduct surgeries to repair obstetric fistulas, but lack the financial resources to do so;

Whereas reconstructive surgery can end the suffering associated with obstetric fistulas;

Whereas a reconstructive surgery for obstetric fistulas developed in the 1850's by Dr. James Sims, a surgeon in South Carolina, has up to a 90 percent success rate;

Whereas the cost of such a surgery is between \$100 and \$400; and

Whereas most women in developing countries are unaware of treatment options, unable to access treatment, or unable to afford treatment: Now, therefore, be it

- 1 *Resolved*, That the House of Representatives—
- 2 (1) recognizes the horrific effects of obstetric
- 3 fistulas on the lives of women who experience them
- 4 as they seek to become mothers; and
- 5 (2) urges the appropriate Federal agencies to
- 6 work with foreign agencies and organizations to im-
- 7 plement programs to provide maternal health care,
- 8 especially the prevention and treatment of obstetric
- 9 fistulas.

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