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**AMERICAN N.G.O.'S PUBLIC HEALTH PROGRAM WORKS TO SAVE
TIBETAN NEWBORNS AND MOTHERS**

PROGRAM IS SUSTAINABLE, REPLICABLE AND SCALABLE

(Salt Lake City, UT) – Each year more than one-half million women worldwide die due to complications of pregnancy and childbirth. Nearly three million infants are stillborn and another four million die before they reach 28 days of age. The vast majority of these maternal and neonatal deaths occur at home among women and newborns living in the poorest and most isolated regions of the world.

In one such region, Tibet, the problem is especially grave: one in 10 babies is said to die within the first 28 days of life and maternal death rates are believed to be among the highest in the world. Since 1998, One H.E.A.R.T. (Health, Education, And Research in Tibet), an American international N.G.O. (INGO) that provides three essential health programs to the Tibetan people, has been working tirelessly to reverse these grim statistics. According to the founder and executive director, Arlene Samen, the majority of Tibetan women give birth at home, in unsanitary conditions, unattended by a skilled birth attendant, midwife or doctor. The lack of skilled medical care leads to easily preventable, yet deadly complications to baby and mother.

Newborn apnea (asphyxiation), which accounts for 2/3 of newborn deaths in Tibet, and post-partum hemorrhaging, which accounts for the majority of maternal deaths, are but a few of the many critical situations One H.E.A.R.T. trains physicians and birth attendants, as well as pregnant Tibetan women and families themselves, to handle during delivery.

Samen says this public health problem threatens Tibetan cultural survival. "When a Tibetan mother dies, her surviving children are three to 10 times more likely to die within two years, and those who do survive are far less likely to attend school or complete their educations. Our programs increase the chances that mothers will survive to nurture and care for their children throughout their childhoods, passing on the rich Tibetan culture and history."

Managed by a Tibetan staff of nine, under the direction of a team of dedicated American medical experts, One H.E.A.R.T. offers three maternal-newborn health programs.

Pregnancy And Village Outreach Tibet (PAVOT), a community based, maternal-newborn health outreach program, is delivered at the village level. Doctors and health workers, trained by One H.E.A.R.T. in basic newborn and maternal life-saving skills, teach simple newborn and maternal life-saving skills to pregnant mothers, immediate family members, and other villagers who may serve as their birth attendants. These skills include how to stimulate and dry the newborn, perform basic newborn resuscitation, cut the umbilical cord with a clean knife, and perform uterine massage to prevent post-partum hemorrhage. Additionally, PAVOT distributes clean birth kits (including vital supplies for a successful birth) to birth attendants, and instructs them on their use. These kits contain essential prenatal vitamins and iron supplements, a sanitary sheet for delivery, sterilized blades for cutting the umbilical cord, warm hats and

blankets for the newborn, and life-saving medication to prevent post-partum hemorrhaging by the mother.

Another One H.E.A.R.T. initiative, the Skilled Birth Attendant Training (SBA) Program, provides essential training in midwifery skills to Tibetan doctors so that they might improve outcomes for mothers and newborns during childbirth, one of the most dangerous period of their lives. Rural doctors meet for three months annually in Lhasa for this training, which includes supervised rotations in maternity wards in several Lhasa hospitals. These trained birth attendants then return to their villages, where they provide direct care for rural mothers and their newborns.

Finally, One H.E.A.R.T.'s Physician Training Program seeks to provide crucial newborn resuscitation training to physicians who provide care for Tibetan newborns in the immediate postpartum period. The Physician Training Program had its first annual training session in Lhasa in 2005, where 17 leading physicians received lectures and hands-on training regarding modern techniques for saving the lives of the newly born.

With the consent of the Chinese government's Tibet Regional Foreign Affairs Office and the Lhasa Prefecture Health Bureau, One H.E.A.R.T.'s programs have reached the majority of physicians, and hundreds of villagers, in Medro Gongkar, one of the poorest counties in the Tibet Autonomous Region. During the last year, nearly 90% of the pregnant women in Medro Gongkar County received three or more prenatal visits, and 86% of all deliveries were attended by ONE H.E.A.R.T.-trained providers; large improvements over previous years.

As a result of One H.E.A.R.T.'s efforts in Medro Gongkar County, the Lhasa Prefecture Health Bureau has asked that One H.E.A.R.T. expand its program activities to other counties in Tibet. "One H.E.A.R.T. programs have a high participation rate among physicians and rural

Tibetans, and appear to have a statistically significant, positive effect on neonatal and maternal mortality,” says Dr. Gelek, director of Lhasa Prefecture Health Bureau, “One H.E.A.R.T. is making a difference, at the grassroots level, in maternal and newborn survival.”

According to the medical director of One H.E.A.R.T.’s PAVOT program, American pediatrician Dr. Ty Dickerson, M.D., a change in the mind-set of Tibetan healthcare providers is taking place as a result of their exposure to One H.E.A.R.T. and its programs. The University of Rochester School of Medicine physician says “The beauty of One H.E.A.R.T. programs is that they go to where rural Tibetans live and bring basic maternal-newborn health care efforts to their doorsteps. Our American doctors and Tibetan staff perform multiple trainings annually in each of the eight townships in Medrogongar County and in Lhasa, thereby constantly reinforcing the essential maternal-newborn health knowledge and lifesaving skills of Tibetans, both doctors and non-doctors, as well as the pregnant women and families they serve. I believe that ongoing and consistent efforts by One H.E.A.R.T. are changing the way that Tibetans think about health, in general, and pregnancy and childbirth, in particular. I feel fortunate to be associated with this organization not only because of its high quality but because of the huge need it fills in Medro Gongkar County.”

At the millennium, the World Health Organization and UNICEF announced their intention to reduce maternal and infant mortality worldwide. Says executive director Samen, “If we can provide effective maternal health programs here on the Tibetan Plateau, one of the poorest and most isolated regions in the world, with an illiterate population, few resources, and no history of skilled birth attendants, these programs can be used effectively anywhere in the developing world.”

Samen says One H.E.A.R.T. looks forward to sharing its knowledge with other developing countries that face public-health challenges similar to those faced by Tibet. “We spent two years understanding Tibetan cultural beliefs and practices around childbirth. This information has guided us in our decisions regarding how to develop programs that modified behaviors that were harmful while respecting local beliefs. These programs are low-cost and applicable to any resource-poor region in the world and, since we have shown them to be feasible in Tibet, we believe they could be scaled up and replicated anywhere. We are happy to share what we have learned with any governmental or nongovernmental organization that desires to improve the lives and the health of mothers and babies in their region.”

One H.E.A.R.T.

One H.E.A.R.T., (Health, Education And Research in Tibet), an American charitable organization, provides maternal-newborn health programs whose goal is improving the survival of mothers and infants in Tibet. One H.E.A.R.T. was founded by Arlene Samen, RN, C.N.P. after seeing the great need for basic health services for pregnant women and their infants during a visit to the region. With headquarters in Lhasa, Tibet, and an office in Salt Lake City, Utah, One H.E.A.R.T has provided essential medical training and preventative health care programs since 1998. For more information, call 801-596-3317, or go to www.onehearttibet.org.