LONDON/GENEVA |11 July 2012 – The World Health Organization (WHO) today committed to fast-track its assessment of new and existing quality **contraceptives** so more women in low- and middle-income countries can obtain and use a broader range of safe and effective contraceptive products.

Other pledges made by WHO at today's Family Planning Summit in London include support to countries to integrate family planning services into basic health care and a systematic examination of why so many women are still unable to obtain contraception when they need it.

"Access to modern contraception is a fundamental right of every woman," says WHO Director-General Dr Margaret Chan, who is chairing a panel at the Summit on increasing access and expanding choice. "Hand-in-hand with this right is a need to honour the dignity of women by giving them a range of family planning options and the freedom to make their own personal choice."

The London Summit aims to mobilize global policy, financing, commodity, and service delivery commitments to support the rights of an additional 120 million women and girls in the world's poorest countries to use contraceptive information, services and supplies, without coercion or discrimination, by 2020.

To help countries make the most of the commitments made at the Summit, WHO has identified a set of recommended policy actions to help countries capitalize on this new opportunity. They include:

- **expanding the range of family planning choices on offer**, so every woman can select a method that meets her needs. WHO is stepping up the prequalification of affordable and safe products and enhancing research into the safety and effectiveness of existing contraceptives, and development of new products. Many large-scale procurers regard WHO prequalification as an important guarantee that they are purchasing good quality products;

- **increasing the number of skilled health workers** trained and allowed to provide family planning services. Some 57 countries are currently experiencing a "health workforce crisis".

WHO advocates for the redistribution of tasks among existing health workers who have the right training, to help countries expand access to services;

- **making family planning an essential component of health care services** provided during the antenatal period, immediately after delivery or after abortion, and during the year following childbirth or abortion;

- **making long-acting and permanent methods of family planning**, such as intrauterine devices, contraceptive implants, vasectomy, and female sterilization,
available and acceptable
;

- **eliminating social and non-medical restrictions on the provision of contraceptives to adolescents** to help reduce early pregnancy and the associated health risks.

An estimated 222 million women and girls in developing countries who do not want to get pregnant lack access to contraceptives, information, and services. The need is greatest where maternal mortality rates are the highest. In many countries, more than 30% of women who want to use contraception are unable to get it. WHO estimates that maternal deaths could be cut by a third if all women wishing to avoid future pregnancies had access to effective contraception. In particular unmarried, young, poor, migrant and rural women often have no access to family planning counselling and services.

The WHO policy briefs launched today focus on the most promising strategies to improve family planning care and strengthen sexual and reproductive health services in developing countries. They are based on recommendations made by a multidisciplinary group of experts convened by WHO to identify best ways to expand access to contraception.