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Contacts:

Cari Sietstra, Consultant, Ibis Reproductive Health, sietstra_at_gmail_dot_com

Britt Wahlin, Director of Development and Communications, Ibis Reproductive Health, bwahlin_at_ibisreproductivehealth_dot_org, 617-549-2852

REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH A CASUALTY OF BURMA'S CONFLICT **Comprehensive new study finds extensive harm in conflict-affected regions** **including widespread injury from unsafe birthing and abortion**

February 6, 2012 – [A new report](#) released today by [Ibis Reproductive Health](#) (Ibis) and the [Global Health Access Program](#) (GHAP) documents a widespread public health emergency in populations affected by the decades-old conflict in eastern Burma. Its consequences include maternal mortality rates that dwarf the rates in Thailand and Burma (Myanmar) as a whole, leaving women in eastern Burma with the worst pregnancy outcomes anywhere in Asia.

According to Dr. Angel Foster, DPhil, MD, of Ibis Reproductive Health and the University of Ottawa, “Our report finds that millions of Burmese and ethnic minorities both inside Burma and along the Thai border have limited or no access to family planning, safe abortion, and general reproductive health care. The toll on women has been particularly severe. Negative effects include high numbers of unplanned pregnancies — and, consequently, high rates of maternal mortality and unsafe abortions. In fact, post-partum hemorrhage and unsafe abortion are the leading causes of maternal death and injury.”

The absence of health care infrastructure inside eastern Burma, as well as for those Burmese living illegally as migrants in Thailand, has produced a kind of reproductive health “perfect storm.” Notes Foster, “Since denial of health care has been an official policy of the Burmese military in ethnic areas, women and men, especially adolescents, know little about family planning practices and voluntary sterilization.”

Other key findings: Despite the fact that rape and sexual violence are extensive problems within both the conflict zones of eastern Burma and in migrant communities in Thailand, the few health workers that do exist generally lack the knowledge and supplies to dispense critical medicines like emergency contraceptive pills (ECPs), which can prevent pregnancy after sexual assault. Even within refugee camps inside Thailand, leaders and organizations working there often adopt policies that prevent unmarried people from accessing family planning information or supplies. Finally, abortion is illegal in Burma unless a woman’s life is at risk and restricted in Thailand. Lack of legal access combined with a lack of trained providers are fundamental causes of morbidity and mortality from abortion.

“Our hope is that the new Burmese government will someday make it possible for more organizations to provide aid and resources to the people in eastern Burma where outside groups are currently banned,” said Cari Sietstra, JD, a consultant at Ibis. “The time has come to rebuild the health and human rights of the millions of men, women, and children affected by this conflict.”

For more information on [Separated by borders, united in need: An assessment of reproductive health on the Thailand-Burma border](#), or to speak with any of the spokespeople listed in this release, please contact Cari Sietstra at sietstra_at_gmail_dot_com.