MIDWIVES, WOMEN AND HUMAN RIGHTS

BACKGROUND
The ICM’s *International Code of Ethics for Midwives (2008)* emphasises the importance of midwives recognising, advocating for, and respecting the human rights of all people and especially for women. Specifically, section 3-d reads: “Midwives understand the adverse consequences that ethical and human rights violations have on the health of women and infants and will work to eliminate these violations”. The World Health Organization (WHO) has identified the need to enhance the rights of women in order to safeguard and promote their health and that of their families. The ICM testifies to its support for the human rights of all women. It also recognises that the majority of midwives are women and therefore likely to experience the same neglect of their human rights as the women who come to them for health care.

The ICM supports all efforts to empower women - including midwives - to gain their human rights and the understanding of the responsibilities that accrue in exercising such rights. The ICM affirms its belief, in accord with the *International Code of Ethics for Midwives*, the ICM Vision Statement and Global Strategy, and the UN *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, that women are worthy of respect and are to be treated with dignity in all situations.

Finally, ICM acknowledges the complexities of working towards human rights, especially where there may be tension for the individual midwife or woman between the general ethical principles she supports and the values or practices prevalent in her own family or community.

POSITION
Midwives will work towards the achievement of human rights for women, as set out in the UN *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and related ICM documents. The ICM will:

- Assist midwives in striving to implement an ethical and human rights approach to health care in all settings (this approach to care respects culture, religion,
ethnicity, gender and individual choices but it does not support actions that result in harm to the health and wellbeing of women and children, or to midwives themselves)

- Promote the inclusion of the principles of ethics and human rights within the midwifery curriculum worldwide

RECOMMENDATIONS
Member associations are encouraged to support all women in the achievement of human rights by taking action to adopt this statement within their organisations; disseminating it widely among midwives, colleagues in other disciplines and health policy-makers; and providing continuing education on topics related to human rights for women in their communities.

RELATED ICM DOCUMENTS
ICM Vision Statement (2008)
ICM Definition of the Midwife (2011)

OTHER RELEVANT DOCUMENTS
CMA Ethical and Human Rights Guidelines in Providing Health Care (1999)
UNFPA A Practical Approach to Gender-Based Violence (2001)
UNFPA. Beijing at 15. UNFPA and Partners Charting the Way Forward. (2010)
UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)
UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979)
UN Protection of the Heritage of Indigenous People (1998)
WHO. Advancing Safe Motherhood through Human Rights. (2001)

Adopted at Vienna International Council meeting, 2002
Revised and endorsed Durban International Council meeting, 2011
Due for next review 2017