

# Nationwide survey to help reduce maternal mortality

By Sandar Linn

THE FIRST nationwide survey on maternal mortality will begin this month, a senior health official said last week.

Dr San Shway Wynn, the director at the Public Health Division of the Department of Health, told *Myanmar Times* on April 25 that the survey aims to identify the specific causes of deaths and where they are most prevalent.

Data gathered during the survey would help to draft a strategic plan for reducing maternal deaths, Dr San Shway Wynn said.

He said the survey, which was funded by the United Nations Children's Fund, would be conducted among 250,000 households in 120 townships.

"It will be the biggest sample of any maternal health survey we have conducted," Dr San Shway Wynn said.

The survey's report is expected to be released in September, he said.

"Maternal and infant mortality rates in this country are high compared to other South-East Asian countries," he said.

Dr San Shway Wynn's comments follow the release of Health Ministry figures that show 4300 maternal

deaths for every 100,000 live births in 2000.

"We have the medical knowledge and the technology so many of those deaths could have been prevented," he said.

"With the global and national focus on achieving the 1999 United Nations' Millennium Development Goals, it is clear that they won't be met unless significant attention is paid to bringing the morbidity and mortality of mothers and infants under control," Dr San Shway Wynn said.

"Malnutrition is a silent killer of mothers and children and we must consider it as one of the priorities in reducing maternal and child deaths."

He said the National Nutrition Centre of the Ministry of Health was also preparing to conduct the first national survey of micronutrients.

Dr Myint Myint Zin, an assistant director at the centre, said that the survey will determine the extent of deficiencies in vitamin A, iron and iodine levels, as well as gauging public perceptions about diseases caused by malnutrition.

The survey, which begins this month, is also being funded by UNICEF, she said.

"It will involve women aged

15 to 49 and children aged six months to five years in 1600 households, and will take an integrated approach to all nutritional factors and diseases caused by malnutrition," Dr Myint Myint Zin said.

"Its report, which is due in August, will assist in the development of a record of the nutrition status of women and children," she said.

According to current estimates, member states of the World Health Organisation's South-East Asia region account for 170,000 maternal and three million child deaths a year, or 30 per cent of the global total.