

WHO links child mortality to economic crisis

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The World Health Organisation warned on Saturday that only a stronger political commitment to child health could prevent a dangerous rise in mortality rates at a time of global economic turmoil.

WHO Director General Margaret Chan told the opening of a [maternal and child health](#) event in the Uzbek capital Tashkent that [mortality rates](#) had reached their lowest levels in more than a generation in the past decade.

"During the previous decade, the number of under-five deaths dropped well below 10 million (per year) for the first time in almost six decades and kept on dropping," Chan said.

"The figure now standing at 7.6 million deaths worldwide."

The biggest maternal mortality rate declines were reported in East Asia and North America, where they reached around 60 percent, she said.

But Chan warned that even the world's richer nations had recorded no recent improvements and called a recent spike in food prices a worrying sign.

"Historically these intentions, expressions and concerns have not been met by the highest level of political commitments" at a time of [economic uncertainty](#), Chan said.

She noted that her Central Asian host country of Uzbekistan "enjoys the

highest level of political commitments" to child care issues since its 1991 independence from Moscow.

"This country has well functioning immunisation campaign with excellent and sensitive surveillance. This is the absolutely critical asset when protecting the health of children," Chan said.

Uzbek President Islam Karimov promised at the event's opening to commit a "further \$1.5 billion... in the coming years" to maternal and child healthcare issues.

International [human rights groups](#) have criticized Uzbekistan's recent family planning programme for allegedly including the forced sterilization of women.

The Uzbek health ministry has repeatedly denied the charge.

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