



VERONICA HENRI/SUN

Singer Natalie Imbruglia, in Toronto yesterday, says she chose to join the UN campaign to eradicate obstetric fistula because the topic is taboo in developing countries and women who suffer from the ailment feel ostracized.

Singer gives voice to ailment

UN push to end obstetric fistula

MARY GAZZE
Toronto Sun

Australian starlet Natalie Imbruglia was in Toronto yesterday to talk about a condition that causes two million women in the Third World to live in shame.

"Governments ... should

make it their responsibility to end this unnecessary suffering," said the petite singer, a spokesman for a United Nations campaign to eradicate obstetric fistula.

Imbruglia, whose most famous hit is 1997's *Torn*, said she chose to aid the cause since the topic is taboo in developing countries and women feel ostracized.

"They needed a voice ... someone who wasn't scared to talk about it. I'm up for a challenge," she said at the Spoke Club on King St. W.

Dr. Ambereen Sleemi, who went to Africa with the UN to perform surgeries, said the condition sometimes causes husbands to abandon their wives, and communities to shun the women.

"It's like pounding your fist against a wall. It's your fist that will give way," she told the *Sun* from Brooklyn, N.Y.

Forced out due to smell

Sleemi said that teaching doctors to birth the child before the tissue is damaged will prevent a fistula.

The condition causes body tissue to die and fall out, leaving a hole, or fistula, that makes women unable to control her urine or excrement.

They are often forced out of their homes because of the smell.

A \$300 US surgery can repair the damage and restore a woman's life.

"They're just beaming ... their dignity's back," Imbruglia said, describing women she met in Nigeria after their procedures.

"They do a little dance when they've had their surgery. You're giving women back their lives because living with fistula is not really living."