

THE SECRETARY OF STATE
WASHINGTON

December 22, 2011

Ms. Ann M. Starrs
President
Family Care International
588 Broadway, Suite 503
New York, New York 10012

Dear Ms. Starrs:

Thank you for your recent letter expressing your concerns regarding the Obama Administration's support for sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, including voluntary family planning. I have always strongly supported these issues, and my travels as Secretary of State have only reinforced my conviction that continued U.S. commitment and involvement in this issue is of paramount importance. Improving the health of women and girls is important in its own right and in turn improves the health of families and communities. I was pleased that Ambassador Lukens read my letter of support at the 2011 International Conference on Family Planning in Dakar.

The Department of State and the U.S. Agency for International Development remain committed to improving the health of women and girls, promoting gender equality, and advancing the status of women and girls through all of our work on global health. You raised particular concern in your letter about my speech at the National Institutes of Health on creating an AIDS-free generation. Of course, AIDS is one of the leading causes of death among women of reproductive age, resulting in 850,000 deaths annually. Women and girls are disproportionately vulnerable to the epidemic and improving women's health, in particular expanding access to reproductive health services, is inextricably linked to the prevention, treatment and care of those with HIV/AIDS. As a result, our work on HIV and AIDS has a strong focus on women, girls, and gender equality. The gender strategy of the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) includes a focus on five cross-cutting areas: (1) increasing gender equity in HIV/AIDS activities and services – including maternal and reproductive health; (2) engaging men and boys; (3) reducing violence and coercion; (4) increasing women's and girls' access to income and productive resources and education; and (5) increasing women's and girls' legal rights and protection.

We are committed to improving the integration of services, including reproductive health services with HIV and AIDS programs, to better address the reproductive health needs of women, especially access to voluntary family planning. PEPFAR teams are actively encouraged to pursue a series of activities, including providing counseling and referrals (linkages) to family planning programs for women in HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment, and care programs – ideally at the same site, and integrating family planning services in prevention of mother-to-child transmission and HIV care and treatment programs.

We look forward to the opportunity to make progress on these issues as we implement the Global Health Initiative (GHI) and the PEPFAR five-year strategy. The upcoming Commission on the Status of Women, Commission on Population and Development, and International AIDS Conference provide additional occasions for the United States to advance this agenda and underscore the importance of reproductive health and the umbrella issue of women's rights and empowerment, and show they have been, and always must be, critical to the foreign policy of this Administration.

I also want to assure you that the Obama Administration strongly supports the goals and programs of the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), which provides life-saving assistance to women, children, and families in over 150 countries. The partnership between the U.S. government and UNFPA is critical to achieving GHI's goals, especially those related to the promotion of sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, including increased access to voluntary family planning, as well as the Millennium Development Goals. We simply could not achieve sustained progress in these areas without UNFPA. I will look for opportunities to express my support in upcoming engagements with Congress.

I commend you on your passion and your contributions for advancing women's health and rights. I very much appreciate the observations provided by you and your NGO colleagues to ensure that we are effectively promoting gender equality, advancing the status of women and girls, and addressing the reproductive health needs of women around the world. Thank you again for taking the time to contact me on this matter.

Sincerely yours,


Hillary Rodham Clinton