

December 1, 2011

The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton
Secretary of State
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Madam Secretary:

Many of us in the reproductive health and rights community are currently in Dakar, Senegal, attending the 2011 International Conference on Family Planning, where we were pleased to receive your message to the participants. We would like to express our gratitude for your leadership to benefit women and girls worldwide, and to request a meeting to discuss U.S. government policy related to reproductive health, including the issues laid out below.

Many of us either attended or listened to your November 8 speech at the National Institutes of Health on creating an AIDS-free generation. We support the Administration's commitment to reducing vertical transmission of HIV infection, promoting male circumcision, and making treatment central to prevention as essential components of a strategy for curbing the AIDS pandemic. These are not, however, the only essential steps, and we were surprised and deeply concerned that your November 8 speech included not a single mention of family planning, contraception, reproductive health, or maternal health. We would like to highlight a few facts:

- Women and girls account for 52 percent of people living with HIV (60 percent in Africa). Integrating HIV prevention, treatment, and care into family planning and maternal and child health programs is a key strategy for maximizing women's access to these services. Women's needs and preferences, including access to reproductive health care, should be central components of any HIV strategy.
- Women living with HIV have the same rights as HIV-negative women to determine the number and spacing of their children. Some 50-85 percent of women living with HIV do not want to become pregnant. Ensuring access to voluntary, affordable, and appropriate contraceptive information and services can help women avoid unintended pregnancies and the attendant health risks, including the risk of vertical transmission.
- The PEPFAR-UNAIDS "Countdown to Zero" initiative has two goals: to eliminate new HIV infections among children by 2015 and to reduce HIV-related maternal deaths by 50 percent. These two goals are intimately related and should always be mentioned in tandem.

This Administration has made it clear that integration of services, including integration of reproductive health and family planning services into basic health care, is a core principle of the U.S. Global Health Initiative, and is part of the PEPFAR 5-year strategy. Some Administration officials, however, seem not only to be neglecting to mention these critical elements of women's health in contexts where they would clearly be relevant, but may actually be avoiding them. In the firm belief that your support for these matters will be a pillar of your legacy, we seek assurance that the Obama Administration remains as committed as you are to reproductive health and rights for women and girls. We therefore request the following specific actions.

First, we understand that Administration representatives will be giving a series of speeches over the next few months on aspects of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, in the run-up to the International AIDS Conference next summer. These speeches are an excellent opportunity to highlight prevention of unintended pregnancy as both an effective way to reduce the spread of HIV *and* as critical to the care and support of women living with HIV. Changing PEPFAR policy to allow the purchase and distribution of contraceptives when needed would be a clear demonstration of the Administration's commitment.

Second, your testimony in defense of the Administration's FY 2013 budget requests would be an excellent opportunity to deliver a clear message to Congress that access to contraception and reproductive health care is crucial to women's health and rights around the world. Modern contraceptive use already prevents 188 million unintended pregnancies per year, resulting in 150,000 fewer maternal deaths. And contrary to what some members of Congress imply, the U.S. public's support for access to contraception is strong and bipartisan: 91 percent support reproductive health care programs, including 84 percent of Republicans and 90 percent of Independents, according to a September 2010 poll by Harris Interactive. We would also welcome, as part of your testimony, a strong endorsement of the recent letter from 122 members of Congress to President Obama in support of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), which is suffering renewed baseless attacks on its funding.

Third, we urge continued Administration commitment to resist all efforts to reimpose the Global Gag Rule. In that connection, clearer guidance is needed to USAID field staff and partner operations that the Helms Amendment and other laws do permit U.S. government support for life-saving abortions, for abortion in cases of rape and incest, for abortion-related counseling and referral, and for post-abortion care. Continued confusion on what is permitted and what is not under existing law is depriving countless women of life-saving medical treatment.

In summary, we are grateful for your continuing support of reproductive health and rights, and request that this support be reflected more strongly and more often in your remarks, public and private, and in the remarks and actions of other Administration officials, including USAID Administrator Dr. Rajiv Shah and Global AIDS Coordinator Dr. Eric Goosby. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss our specific recommendations with you or your staff. Please be assured of our continuing attention to these matters.

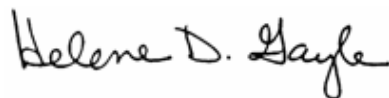
Sincerely,



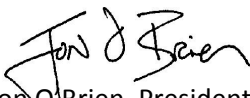
Debra Hauser, President [incoming]
Advocates for Youth



Valerie DeFillipo, President
Americans for UNFPA



Helene D. Gayle, President and CEO
CARE USA



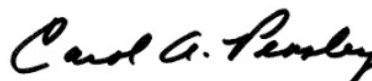
Jon O'Brien, President
Catholics for Choice



Serra Sippel, President
Center for Health and Gender Equity



Nancy Northup, President
Center for Reproductive Rights



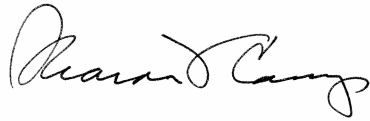
Carol Peasley, President and CEO
Centre for Development and Population
Activities (CEDPA)



Pamela W. Barnes, President and CEO
EngenderHealth



Ann M. Starrs, President
Family Care International



Sharon L. Camp, President and CEO
Gutmacher Institute



Beverly Winikoff, President
Gynuity Health Projects



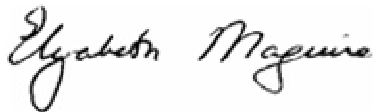
Kelly Blanchard, President
Ibis Reproductive Health



Sarah Degnan Kambou, President
International Center for Research on Women
(ICRW)



Carmen Barroso, Regional Director
International Planned Parenthood Federation
Western Hemisphere Region



Elizabeth S. Maguire
President and CEO, Ipas



Dana Hovig, Chief Executive
Marie Stopes International



Daniel Pellegrom, President and CEO
Pathfinder International



Suzanne Ehlers, President and CEO
Population Action International



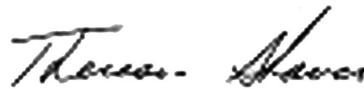
John Seager, President and CEO
Population Connection



Peter J. Donaldson, President
Population Council



Karl Hofmann, President and CEO
Population Services International (PSI)



Theresa Shaver, President/Executive Director
White Ribbon Alliance for Safe Motherhood

cc:

Dr. Rajiv Shah, Administrator, U.S. Agency for International Development

Dr. Eric Goosby, Ambassador, Office of the Global AIDS Coordinator

Lois Quam, Executive Director, Global Health Initiative