

[Date] January 20, 2009

Dear President Obama,

The undersigned organizations working to promote women's sexual and reproductive health and rights write to express deep gratitude for your repeal of the Global Gag Rule. We thank you for ending this restrictive policy, which has contributed to the deaths and injuries of countless women and girls and undermined the democratic participation of non-governmental organizations in many countries. From our daily work with those most affected, we know that your action will have profound positive effects on the lives of millions of people. We are hopeful that it heralds a new era of U.S. partnership in global cooperation to ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and the advancement of women's sexual and reproductive rights worldwide.

Historically, the United States has played a pivotal role in improving the sexual and reproductive health of vulnerable women in the developing world, including as a leading funder of international family planning, HIV/AIDS and other reproductive health programs. In earlier years, policy leadership from the United States was critical in achieving landmark agreements at the International Conference on Population and Development in 1994 and Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995. At both conferences, U.S. delegations led efforts to forge global consensus on strategies to assure individuals' and couples' rights to attain the highest standard of reproductive and sexual health and to decide freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children, free of discrimination, coercion and violence, including through access to safe abortion, where legal. After eight years of U.S. policies that undermined these and other commitments by the United States and many other countries, we are now at a moment to move forward once again.

The need for action is greater than ever. Worldwide, poor reproductive health remains the leading cause of death for women, particularly in the most impoverished countries. More than half a million women die from pregnancy or childbirth complications each year. At least 200 million women lack access to family planning and contraceptive information and services, contributing to more than 40 million pregnancies that are terminated every year, half of them unsafely. Complications from unsafe abortion result in approximately 67,000 deaths and at least 5 million serious injuries annually, all of which are preventable. The incidence of HIV/AIDS continues to grow at an alarming rate, with insufficient attention to preventive measures, including greater access to basic sexual and reproductive health information and services, especially for young people.

Sound public health investments by the United States and other governments in sexual and reproductive health and rights can help women exert more control over their own lives and overcome these and other health challenges, which are likely to grow more acute in the midst of an unprecedented global economic crisis. We hope that your Administration will honor America's human rights obligations and strongly support the achievement of our global health commitments, including the Millennium Development Goal to halve maternal mortality by 2015, which includes a target for achieving universal access to reproductive health care. We specifically call on you to:

- significantly increase U.S. funding for comprehensive sexual and reproductive health, including family planning and maternal health
- support integration of HIV/AIDS and other sexual and reproductive health programs and removal of the anti-prostitution pledge in PEPFAR
- support removal of remaining legal and policy restrictions on U.S. funding for safe, voluntary, legal abortion information and services, including the Helms Amendment

- restore funding for the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), and
- ensure that officials from your Administration act as a strong voice for women's sexual and reproductive health and rights in the United Nations and other international arenas and do all in their power to translate international agreements into actions that improve women's lives.

Your administration holds great promise for the health and lives of women and for the future of families and communities everywhere. We thank you again for removing the Global Gag Rule and stand ready to support and assist you in achieving our common goal of ensuring that all women can enjoy the sexual and reproductive rights they need to live happy, healthy, productive lives.

Sincerely,

Ipas, USA

Center for Reproductive Rights, USA

Family Care International, USA

International Planned Parenthood Federation, UK

International Planned Parenthood Federation, Western Hemisphere Region, USA

Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada/Coalition pour le droit à l'avortement au Canada, Canada

Associação para o Planeamento da Família/Family Planning Association (APF), Portugal

Associazione italiana donne per lo sviluppo/ Italian Association for Women in Development (AIDOS), Italy

CASA Netherlands, Netherlands

Catholics for Choice, USA

Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE), USA

Center for Women's Global Leadership, USA

Equilibres & Populations, France

Flemish Centre of Expertise on Sexual Health and HIV, Belgium

Global Doctors for Choice, Global

Grupo de Información en Reproducción Elegida/Information Group on Reproductive Choice (GIRE), Mexico

Grupo de Interés Español en Población, Desarrollo y Salud Reproductiva, Spain

Human Rights Watch, Global

International Community of Women Living with HIV/AIDS (ICW), UK

International Women's Health Coalition, Global

Irish Family Planning Association, Ireland

Physicians for Reproductive Choice and Health (PRCH), USA

Population and Sustainability Network, UK

PSI, USA

PSI-Europe, Netherlands

Seimos planavimo ir seksualinės sveikatos asociacija/Family Planning and Sexual Health Association,
Lithuania

Swedish Association for Sexuality Education (RFSU), Sweden

World Population Foundation, Global