



Human Rights Now

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Human Rights Now—Statement against President Trump’s Abortion Policies

Human Rights Now, a Tokyo-based international human rights NGO, expresses serious concerns over US President Trump’s January 23, 2017 Presidential Memorandum Regarding the Mexico City Policy. In banning the channeling of federal dollars to international organizations performing or providing information on abortion services as part of their health services, this order effectively forces organizations to choose between providing these services or losing US funding, funds that go towards other offered health services.

More commonly known as the “global gag rule” for its restrictive effect on organizations’ ability to offer comprehensive family planning—referring to planning about how many children a couple or individual will have and when to have them—and maternal health advice, this policy is particularly concerning for its wide scope. Whereas previous versions under Reagan and Bush limited the ban to federal family planning funding, Trump’s policy curbs all global health funding involving abortion materials. Such expansiveness impairs not only critical reproductive services, but also much needed primary health care, maternal health care, and other health services. This is true whether they implicate abortion and family planning, such as treatment of genetic disorders or HIV, or not, such as malaria and zika prevention and treatment at facilities wanting to maintain comprehensive family planning counseling and services.

Moreover, the policy discriminates against women by specifically targeting women’s health services and forcing them to choose between service and counseling restrictions or a withdrawal of funding. Studies from the World Health Organization¹ show that the loss of critical federal funds leads to increased unintended pregnancies and unsafe practices. One reason is that health care providers at places like women’s health centers, who serve as women’s main and sometimes only source of care for both reproductive health and primary health care,² will be forced to reduce their services or lay off staff.

The implementation of this discriminatory policy, which prevents women from accessing a range of vital health services and/or family planning information, is inconsistent with the United States’

¹ Bendavid, et al, “United States aid policy and induced abortion in sub-Saharan Africa”, 7 June 2011, <http://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/89/12/11-091660/en/>.

² Phelan, et al, “Delivery of Primary Care to Women”, Jan 2000, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1495323/>.

obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women to guarantee women's access to family planning information and to not discriminate in the area of health care (Articles 10, 12, 14, and 16).³ Moreover, the policy undermines reproductive health and denies women rights which were confirmed at the International Conference on Population and Development in 1994, significantly hindering international efforts to promote the equal rights of women.

Therefore, Human Rights Now urgently strongly calls on President Trump to revoke the Presidential Memorandum of January 23, 2017 to ensure the protection of women's right to health both domestically and abroad.

³ Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), 18 Dec. 1979, 1249 UNTS 13, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm#article12>; OHCHR, "Sexual and reproductive health and rights", <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Women/WRGS/Pages/HealthRights.aspx>