

May 14, 2014

The President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500
United States of America

Dear President Obama,

We write as leaders of faith-based organizations who are committed to women's health and human rights throughout the world. Although we come from different religious traditions, we are united in our belief that women and girls who face sexual violence and rape deserve meaningful access to the full range of reproductive healthcare options including safe abortion. To this end, we urge you to use your executive authority to end the longstanding misinterpretation of the Helms amendment, which in current practice denies women and girls access to safe abortion services even in cases of rape, incest and life endangerment.

We believe that it is unacceptable—and in fact immoral—for our nation to continue to apply the Helms amendment incorrectly. As you know, the Helms amendment prohibits foreign assistance from being used to “pay for the performance of abortion as a method of family planning or to motivate or coerce any person to practice abortions.” When a pregnancy is a result of rape or incest, or when a pregnancy is a threat to the life of a woman, safe abortion can and should be made available and accessible, and U.S. foreign assistance should support such access. Unfortunately, the Helms amendment does just the opposite: it denies millions of women and girls access to safe abortion services. While ultimately we seek elimination of this law, at a minimum the executive branch of the U.S. government should clarify existing law so that in the cases of rape, incest and life endangerment, U.S. foreign assistance is allowed to support abortion access.

We applaud the unprecedented steps taken by your administration to establish a U.S. foreign policy that puts women and girls at its center. The National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security; the White House Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence; and the newly launched Safe from the Start Initiative demonstrate a deep commitment to the health and human rights of women and girls globally.

As faith leaders, we ask that you continue to build on this momentum. Ensuring that U.S. policy and programs support the provision of comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services for women and girls globally – including safe abortion in the cases of rape, incest and life endangerment – is the natural extension of your policies. It is also a moral imperative.

In the spirit of our shared religious support for peace, justice and human rights, we urge you to take executive action – such as an executive order – to help women and girls gain access to the healthcare they need and deserve by clarifying that U.S. law and policy supports access to safe abortion services in the cases of rape, incest and life endangerment.

In Faith,

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President and CEO
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Dr. Michael J. Adee
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Chair, Clergy Advocacy Board
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*Organizations for identification purposes only.

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*Organizations for identification purposes only.

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CC: J. Mark Brinkmoeller, Director, Center for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, USAID
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Melissa Rogers, Executive Director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood
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