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***U.S. Politics Undermine HIV Prevention Efforts at Expense of Women and Youth  
President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) Continues to Support Abstinence-Be  
Faithful-Only Programs, Despite New Strategy***

VIENNA/AIDS 2010, July 20, 2010 — Public health advocates at the XVIII

International AIDS Conference exposed evidence that the United States' President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) continues to promote and fund HIV programs that use a discredited and ineffective Abstinence and Be Faithful (AB-only) approach. These programs, which are not required to teach about or provide condoms, directly violate promises from Obama administration officials that PEPFAR would instead begin to implement comprehensive, evidence-based approaches to HIV prevention that include information about female and male condom use and distribution.

“PEPFAR is still funding Abstinence and Be Faithful programs that undermine basic rights and we know don't work,” said Serra Sippel, president of the Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE). “That may be the most egregious component of this. Public health experts know we need to fund comprehensive programs, the Obama administration has publicly endorsed a comprehensive approach, the Office of the Global AIDS Coordinator released a strategy supporting it, and still, we're looking at requests for applications for AB-only programs.

It's a betrayal to the global health community, but that pales in comparison to the way this betrays women and youth. Theirs are the lives we are sacrificing while we play politics.”

A U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Request for Applications, dated March 2010, states that prevention programs should include “coordination of the ‘Abstinence and Be Faithful’ initiative through education on abstinence targeted among in- and out-of-school youths, and fidelity among married couples and those in monogamous relationships.” Condom use was mentioned briefly at the end of the request, but the inclusion of condom education or distribution is not required of applicants. The project is funded at \$310 million.

AB-only programming has already proven to fail married women and women in monogamous relationships, as they are still at risk if their partner is engaging in unsafe sexual activity outside of the primary relationship. Furthermore, multiple peer reviewed scientific studies have confirmed that a comprehensive approach to HIV education – programs that include information about abstinence, partner reduction, and correct and consistent condom use – is most effective with young people.

Jaevion Nelson, a youth activist from Jamaica, expressed appreciation for PEPFAR, but noted the failures of AB-only programming among youth. “Young people are continually marginalized in the fight against HIV and AIDS. Why are young people still being denied comprehensive sex education? We need abstinence, we need faithfulness, and we need condoms if we are to combat HIV. PEPFAR needs to ensure that the abstinence only campaign ends - because young people are having sex.”

“To win this fight, we really need a comprehensive approach. Being married does not protect you from HIV. I was married for 13 years, and during that time, I did not stray from my marital bed, but I still contracted HIV,” said Carol Nawina Nyirenda, a leader in the HIV/AIDS,

malaria and tuberculosis movement from Zambia. “The information I had at the time was not accurate or consistent. PEPFAR needs to make sure that its prevention programs give accurate and full information to all.”

“In the global fight against HIV and AIDS, we should use every tool that is available. Education is crucial, but condoms are still the best defense we have for sexually active individuals,” said Advocates for Youth president James Wagoner. “HIV prevention without condoms is like driver’s ed without seatbelts; all other efforts are too little, too late. It is simply unacceptable for the Obama administration to continue failed HIV prevention strategies that are driven by ideology rather than by sound public health science.”

Sippel also noted that in a recent field visit to Ethiopia, CHANGE witnessed PEPFAR-funded AB-only programs that simply recommended that information about condoms be obtained from other programs. “All people have the right to easily access all the information and tools they need to protect themselves. AB-only programs with referral services for condom information place an unnecessary burden on individuals who are trying to protect themselves. These extra barriers will inevitably lead to fewer people accessing services – and will leave even more people at risk of HIV infection,” Sippel said.

U.S.-based organizations Advocates for Youth and the Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE) called on the U.S. government to take the following actions:

- Stop funding AB-only programs and support prevention programs that are comprehensive and include information about male and female condoms and negotiation skills for their use.
- Remove from PEPFAR the reporting requirement that stipulates programs in countries with general epidemics must justify to Congress any decision to spend less than 50 percent of funds on AB programs.
- Implement a human-rights-based framework that recognizes all individuals’ right to comprehensive health care and education free from discrimination or coercion.
- Assure that all health services are youth-friendly, and financially, and physically accessible to all.

PEPFAR, originally launched in 2003 by President George W. Bush, has always favored ideology-based AB-only programming at the expense of comprehensive, evidence-based prevention efforts. Under the Obama Administration, OGAC released a strategy adopting a comprehensive prevention approach in lieu of AB-only; however, PEPFAR continues to fund many of the same AB-only programs that received support under the Bush Administration. Contradictions to the new strategy also appear in PEPFAR reporting requirements, which still stipulate that programs in countries with general epidemics must justify to Congress any decision to spend less than 50 percent of funds on AB programs.

#### **About the Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE)**

The Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE) is a U.S.-based non-governmental organization that seeks to ensure that U.S. foreign policies and programs promote sexual and reproductive health and rights through effective, evidence-based approaches to prevention and treatment of critical reproductive and sexual health concerns, and through increased funding for critical international programs and institutions. For more information, visit

[www.genderhealth.org](http://www.genderhealth.org)

#### **About Advocates for Youth**

Established in 1980 as the Center for Population Options, Advocates for Youth champions efforts that help young people make informed and responsible decisions about their reproductive and sexual health and rights. Advocates believes it can best serve the field by boldly advocating for a more positive and realistic approach to adolescent sexual health. Advocates focuses its work on young people ages 13-24 in the U.S. and around the globe. For more information, visit [www.advocatesforyouth.org](http://www.advocatesforyouth.org)