



CHANGE Matters

Dear Advocate,

After a winter consumed by attacks on reproductive rights, the fresh air of spring came for me in the form of 20 amazing women.

With generous support from UNAIDS and the MAC AIDS Fund, CHANGE hosted earlier this month 20 empowered women living with HIV for our first leadership and advocacy training specifically designed for them. They represented eight different countries, including the United States, Southern Sudan, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Kenya, Lesotho, Nigeria, Ghana, and Ukraine. We witnessed solidarity form between the women from the U.S. and Global South as they became advocates for one another. The women spoke resolutely against U.S. budget cuts—at home and abroad—that would endanger anyone's access to HIV treatment, to family planning, to maternal health care, and to the full range of reproductive health services. They spoke eloquently from their life stories about the importance of integrated, rights-based care, because women living with HIV need family planning, want healthy children, and demand respect for their decisions just like anyone else. And they spoke in one voice to demand higher level participation for women living with HIV within national and international deliberative bodies. In each visit with legislators, high-level Obama administration officials, and with our global health colleagues, their stories brought real meaning to the significance of budget cuts. It was a powerful, hopeful piece of advocacy. I hope you will visit CHANGE's [Facebook page for photos](#) and testimonies from the participants.

Your support enables us to bring women to the center of political debates in Washington, and is appreciated as always. We'll look to you for your [continued support and advocacy](#) in the coming months as Congress continues the budget process and makes crucial decisions about women's health and rights globally. In peace and solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Serra Sippel".

Serra Sippel
President, Center for Health and Gender Equity

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Building Global Leadership, Advocacy, and Partnerships among Women Living with HIV

Teresia Otieno, from Kenya, was 26 years old when she was forcibly sterilized. It was decided for her that, because she was living with HIV, her reproductive rights did not matter, and therefore should be taken away -- permanently.

With support from UNAIDS and MAC AIDS, Teresia and 19 other women living with HIV joined CHANGE, the US Positive Women's Network, and the International Community of Women Living With HIV/AIDS in Washington two weeks ago to build their leadership skills and advocate for their sexual and reproductive health and rights with members of Congress and administration officials. They represented eight different countries, including the United States, and were able to combine skills from the training with their own moving stories about what it means to live with HIV.

"Stigma is what kills you," said Gifty Torkonu of Ghana, "not the disease."

Each story brought the stigma and human rights issues that are intrinsically linked with HIV to the foreground. They also demonstrated that the synergy between HIV and sexual and reproductive health and rights is not confined to policy documents.

"I do not want 20 years from now another girl standing here in this forum talking about their experience (with HIV) simply because they had no education on their sexual and reproductive health," said Anna Irungu of Kenya.

By the end of the few days the participants spent in Washington, the participants had been featured on [Voice of America's In Focus](#), [The American Prospect](#), and the [Huffington Post](#). They had met with Jeff Crowley, director of the Office of National AIDS Policy and Ann Gavaghan, Chief of Staff at the Office of the National AIDS Coordinator, and held a panel at the Kaiser Family Foundation.

U.S. and international participants conducted joint visits to Congressional offices. After visiting with constituents from San Diego and guests from Zimbabwe and Lesotho, Rep. Bob Filner sent a signed group photo with a [letter](#) stating: "I appreciated hearing about the needs of someone living with HIV. Rest assured, I will continue to work with my colleagues to provide comprehensive and affordable reproductive health care."

Moving forward, each participant, and the staff here at CHANGE, has a rejuvenated commitment to affecting sincere policy change to benefit women living with HIV globally.

Female Condom Advocacy Workshop in Guatemala

[Female condoms](#) are the only existing HIV/STI and pregnancy dual protection device designed specifically to be initiated by women. But to the women that use them, or want to use them, they mean so much more than protection and prevention. For advocates in Latin America and the Caribbean, female condoms are a question of equality, empowerment, and human rights.

"Female condoms give women the power to say 'I want to use my own protection—my condom,'" said one participant in CHANGE's [Female Condom Advocacy Workshop](#), hosted in Guatemala in February.

[Twenty participants](#) from Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, and Honduras attended the workshop, where they honed their advocacy skills to promote female condom funding and programming at the national level. They met with the Guatemalan Ministry of Health, USAID, and UNFPA [to make their case](#).

Throughout the course of the workshop, participants articulated a clear need for female condoms that was apparent in all of their respective countries: Increasing risk of HIV among young people and women. They also identified common barriers to female condom supply and distribution. The most important of these is lack of funding and political will from donors and government, but cumbersome product registration requirements at the country level and the stigma that still plagues female condoms are also factors. Most importantly, each participant left the training with a [country-specific plan](#) to advocate for increased funding and support of female condoms.

The advocates have already made impressive headway in the few weeks following the workshop. Dominican activists have planned a meeting with major stakeholders, Mexican activists have mobilized collegial organizations to demand government approval for the FC2 female condom in a major newspaper, and Costa Rican activists have received assurances from the head of their national health system that they will approve FC2 for use in the country.

"It's a matter of equality of rights," a participant said. "Men have their condom, and we should have ours too."

A Letter to Congress, Signed by Women NGO Leaders

CHANGE, in partnership with the Centre for Population and Development Activities (CEDPA), spearheaded [a letter to Congress](#) signed exclusively by women who lead development, health, and human rights organizations, in support of funding for women's sexual and reproductive health abroad. The letter marks the first time women NGO executives from a broad spectrum of health and development have united to support foreign assistance for women's health and rights.

The letter, written in direct response to cuts to the foreign assistance budget proposed by the House of Representatives, calls for continued funding and support of HIV and AIDS and reproductive health programs, including family planning and maternal health. It noted that, "The House of Representatives has proposed cuts to the foreign assistance budget for the remainder of FY11 that would result in serious setbacks to the advancement of global women's health and rights, and in turn, to global economic development overall. As women leading organizations that promote economic development, health, and human rights globally, we are writing to ask for your commitment to protect and prioritize foreign assistance dollars that support the well-being, rights, and empowerment of women and girls."

The letter is critical as Congress debates a budget extension for the remainder of FY 2011 and considers funding for FY 2012.

U.S. Congressman Chris Smith Takes War on Women Global

The Center for Reproductive Rights (CRR) and Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE) are condemning U.S. Representative Chris Smith's (R-NJ) trip to Kenya on Monday, March 21st, where he attacked the country's new constitution and opened a new front in the international offensive of his war on women.

Smith spoke under the guise of "human rights" at the Kenya Christian Professionals Forum. He condemned the new Kenya constitution's decriminalization of abortion in emergency situations or to protect the life or health of the pregnant woman, telling audience members that —we need "a world that is free of abortion."

In May of last year, Rep. Smith argued in a letter to the State Department's Inspector General that the U.S. ambassador to Kenya should not be permitted to discuss Kenya's abortion law – yet on Monday, Rep. Smith viciously attacked Kenya's modest efforts to permit abortions where the life or health of the mother is at risk, or in an emergency situation.

"It's the hypocrisy that is so repugnant," said Serra Sippel, president of the Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE). "Rep. Smith promotes himself as a defender of human rights while trampling the rights of women and putting them directly in harm's way—and this smacks of a desire to impose abroad what he cannot accomplish at home."

[Read the full press release](#)

CHANGE Event: Women's Global Health and Rights, March 29, Boston

CHANGE invites all interested persons to an upcoming [panel presentation in Boston](#), held in cooperation with State Representative Kay Khan, who participated in CHANGE's study tour to Ethiopia in July 2010.

Women's Global Health and Rights

The Importance of Sexual and Reproductive Health

Introductory remarks by Massachusetts Senate President Therese Murray

Tuesday, March 29, 1:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.
Massachusetts State House, Members Lounge, 3rd Floor
(Beacon Street at Park Street, Park Street Station T stop)

This event will provide an overview of how access to a comprehensive, rights-based package of sexual and reproductive health services can impact the lives of women and girls globally. The panelists will discuss how this impact is connected to achieving larger U.S. global health and development goals and the importance of ensuring strong U.S. policy and adequate funding for maternal health, HIV, and family planning.

Panelists

Dianne Luby, President/CEO, Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts
State Representative Kay Khan, Massachusetts, 11th Middlesex District
Michael Holscher, Senior Vice President & Strategy/External Affairs Director, Marie Stopes International
Serra Sippel, President, Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE)
Shahira Ahmed, doctoral student, Department of Global Health and Population, Harvard School of Public Health

RSVP: Deepika Allana at dallana@genderhealth.org or
Rep. Kay Khan at kay.khan@mahouse.gov by Thursday, March 24.

A Healthy Future for Women and Girls Globally: Third Annual Action Summit on Comprehensive Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, May 1-3

CHANGE is pleased to announce that we are now accepting applications from emerging and experienced advocates to participate in a three-day advocacy training on comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights and U.S. foreign policy in Washington D.C., May 1-3, 2011.

Applications are open to individuals in the United States who live and are registered to vote in the following states: Maine, Massachusetts, Vermont, Illinois, and Nevada.

Participation in the Healthy Future Action Summit is free for accepted applicants. Expenses will be covered in full by CHANGE (e.g. travel, accommodations, dining). Additional background information and Summit details can be [found in the application](#).

We encourage you to circulate the application to anyone who may be interested and eligible to participate. People living with HIV are strongly encouraged to apply.

Please do not hesitate to contact kwhipkey@genderhealth.org for an application or more information.

Washington Update

Congress:

The [Republican majority in the House of Representatives](#) has proposed budget cuts for the remainder of FY11 that would slash more than \$200 million from international family planning and reproductive health services, impose the [Global Gag Rule](#) as law, and reduce funding for HIV and AIDS programs to [FY 2008 levels](#). The proposed cuts sacrifice global women's sexual and reproductive health and rights supposedly in the name of reducing the federal deficit, regardless of the fact that global health funding accounts for less than one percent of the budget. The anticipated human toll of the cuts is significant, including a marked increase in maternal deaths and HIV infections.

To date, the House and Senate have yet to come to an agreement on the budget legislation that would keep the government funded through the end of FY11. They have been passing a series of emergency stop-gap measures that fund the government for a few weeks at a time; the most recent was passed on March 17 and will fund the federal government through April 8.

Overall, the [aggressive attacks](#) on family planning and reproductive health services, including the proposed defunding of Planned Parenthood, indicate a hostile environment for family planning in general. In February, Rep. Bob Latta (R-OH) proposed an amendment to the budget legislation that would have zeroed out all funding for international family planning, but it was tabled because of a technicality. We expect to see something similar introduced in the future.

The U.S. Global Health Initiative (GHI):

The U.S. Global Health Initiative (GHI) recently released [strategy documents](#) for seven of the eight designated “GHI Plus” countries, including Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Kenya, Malawi, and Mali. Rwanda is the only remaining country still awaiting a strategy. It also released an updated [strategy document](#) and launched the official [GHI website](#) earlier this month. The releases mark one of the most critical steps toward implementation since President Obama announced the GHI in 2009. They also come on the heels of veteran health care executive Lois Quam’s appointment as the executive director of the GHI.

The new GHI and country strategies maintain the GHI’s commitment to women and girls, as well as country-ownership.

Related resources:

[“Obama’s Global Health Initiative: Getting it Right the Third Time Around.”](#) CHANGE, *Huffington Post*

[A Woman-Centered Approach to the U.S. Global Health Initiative](#), CHANGE, February 2010

GHI Coalition report: [The Future of Global Health](#)

CHANGE in the Media

Press Release: [US Congressman Chris Smith Take War on Women Global](#)

The American Prospect: [“Congress Backpedals on Global HIV/AIDS Prevention”](#)

Huffington Post: [“Women Living With HIV: A Lesson in Resilience and Rights That Cannot be Ignored”](#)

Science Speaks: [“Condom Gap “Quite Disturbing” According to PEPFAR”](#)

The Investigative Fund: [“Casting the First Stone”](#)

Huffington Post: [“Ugandan Tragedy, Human Rights, and U.S. Foreign Aid”](#)

thehill.com: [“Global health is important foreign policy issue for 2011”](#)

BelowtheWaist.com: [CHANGE Podcast on Ethiopia](#)

Support CHANGE

Please consider making a [contribution](#) today. Any way you choose to contribute, your support strengthens our efforts to ensure U.S. foreign policies and programs promote the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and girls worldwide. For federal employees, CHANGE is part of the Combined Federal Campaign, #62113.



Center for Health and Gender Equity | 1317 F St. NW, Suite 400, Washington, DC 20004 | www.genderhealth.org

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