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EQUITY

*Advancing
gender equity
and social justice
in international
population and
health policy*

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PRESS RELEASE

Center for Health and Gender Equity Condemns U.S. Action to Deny Contraceptive Supplies in Africa

(Washington, D.C.)—Today, the Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE) strongly condemned the Bush administration for its efforts to prevent foreign governments from providing U.S.-donated contraceptive supplies to Marie Stopes International (MSI), a UK-based organization that provides family planning services globally.

As an October 1 press release from MSI reports, and sources within the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) confirm, administration officials have instructed USAID personnel in six African countries to ensure that recipient governments do not pass on U.S.-donated contraceptive supplies to MSI. These instructions were sent to USAID missions in Ghana, Malawi, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

“This action undermines the decision making processes of sovereign governments, who distribute donated resources in a way that they’ve determined best meets the needs of their citizens,” said CHANGE executive director Serra Sippel. “Why is the U.S. government subverting public health interventions that reduce maternal deaths in developing countries?” Sippel continued, “This is yet another example of the Bush administration sacrificing women’s health to pander to its ultra-conservative political base.”

The administration claims this action is supported by the Kemp-Kasten Amendment, which prohibits funding for entities that support or promote coercive abortion or involuntary sterilization. The U.S. government has not provided evidence that MSI supports or promotes these practices. Moreover, the U.S. does not fund MSI. However, because MSI works with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in China, which in turn has been accused of violating Kemp-Kasten, the administration has taken this step to prevent any U.S.-donated contraceptives from reaching MSI.

The accusations against UNFPA have been disproved by many sources, including a delegation sent by the State Department in 2002. Evidence notwithstanding, the Bush administration has used a broad interpretation of Kemp-Kasten to deny funding to UNFPA’s global programs since 2002.

“The Bush administration is using its final months to stretch the interpretation of Kemp-Kasten far beyond the breaking point,” Sippel commented. “The evidence points to a pattern – it appears

they're trying to move the bar to further restrict sexual and reproductive health and rights at home and abroad, so that a subsequent administration with a similar anti-family planning agenda will have the precedent of these harsher restrictions.”

While the impact of this action is not yet clear, MSI operates a total of 89 clinics in the six countries, providing family planning and HIV prevention programs for thousands of women and men. MSI reports that in one of the six countries, they are responsible for 25% of all family planning services. If foreign governments comply with the U.S. demand, these clinics may experience severe shortages of contraceptives, leaving women with few pregnancy and HIV prevention options.

According to MSI, their family planning programs globally “prevented 5 to 7 million unwanted pregnancies in 2007 alone, thus preventing 1 to 1.5 million abortions.”

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The Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE) is a U.S.-based non-governmental organization that seeks to ensure that U.S. international 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.

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