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GENDER
EQUITY

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

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PRESS RELEASE

Concession on Global AIDS Bill Compromises Women's Health and Rights

Center for Health and Gender Equity disappointed in Senate committee's Global AIDS bill that fails to provide effective HIV/AIDS strategy for women and girls

(Washington, D.C.)— Following a vote in the House Committee on Foreign Affairs to reauthorize the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) last month, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee has passed its own version of the Tom Lantos and Henry J. Hyde United States Global Leadership Against HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria Reauthorization Act of 2008, S. 2731. The Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE) criticizes the Senate bill for prioritizing political expediency over the health and rights of women and girls.

Like the House version, the bill that Senators Biden (D-DE) and Lugar (R-IN) have introduced requires an explanation from the Global AIDS Coordinator if funding for programs that promote abstinence and fidelity falls below 50% of prevention spending in countries with generalized AIDS epidemics. The bill also retains the requirement that organizations pledge opposition to prostitution in order to receive U.S. global AIDS funding.

Commenting on the Senate's bill, Serra Sippel, executive director of the Center for Health and Gender Equity stated, "We hear all sorts of praise for the bipartisan compromise over PEPFAR, but how can we praise a bill that sidelines sound science and the health and rights of women? Balanced prevention allows individuals to make informed decisions and choices about their sexual and reproductive health based on their life circumstances. The 50% reporting requirement continues the legacy of the 33% earmark by encouraging the promotion of abstinence-only programs over effective, comprehensive prevention."

While the Senate bill to reauthorize PEPFAR provides \$50 billion for HIV/AIDS, TB, and Malaria efforts over a five year period, it fails to include a strategy for addressing the unique vulnerabilities of women and girls to HIV infection. The Senate bill also removes all provisions for integrating HIV/AIDS services with family planning and reproductive health services.

"The same factors that place women and girls at risk for HIV place them at risk of unwanted pregnancy. Political compromise marred attempts to integrate family planning and HIV/AIDS services in the House bill; we hoped that the Senate would be more resistant to political pressure. We're disappointed that elected officials in Washington are so willing to bargain with the health and rights of women abroad," stated Sippel. "Now, we

can only hope that members of the House and Senate will put aside political agendas and rectify the shortcomings of these bills during floor debate and conference.”

The Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE) is a US-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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