



# CHANGE Matters

March 2009

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Dear Friends,

It's a new day for women and girls around the world! Like many of you, at CHANGE we are heartened by recent developments that have advanced sexual and reproductive health and rights globally. President Obama rescinded the Global Gag Rule as one of his first acts in office and recently signed a bill restoring funding for the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). He also reversed a Bush administration policy that blocked African governments from providing U.S.-funded contraceptive commodities to Marie Stopes International, a London-based organization that provides sexual and reproductive health services in developing countries. In other exciting news, the FC2 female condom, a second generation product manufactured by the Female Health Company, was recently granted regulatory approval by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and USAID is poised to make the new product available through U.S.-funded programs.

After eight years of walking out of step with the international community on sexual and reproductive health and human rights, the U.S. change in direction is refreshing.

We've also been creating our own change in the new year by bringing women's voices to bear on critical issues such as the sex sector and human trafficking. In March, CHANGE hosted health advocates from India, Mali, Cambodia and Brazil to educate the administration and Congress about why the health and human rights of sex workers must be promoted and protected by U.S. foreign policy. We also continue to shape the debate around foreign assistance reform, and we hope you'll join us over the coming months in advocating for a framework that places comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights at its core. We encourage you to get involved today by making a [contribution to CHANGE](#). Your support is greatly appreciated!

We hope this first issue in 2009 is informative and useful, and we welcome your comments and feedback on how we are doing.

In solidarity,



Serra Sippel, Executive Director  
Center for Health and Gender Equity

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**"I am calling for... placing prevention more firmly in the hands of women. We need wider distribution and use of female condoms."**

--Michel Sidibe, Executive Director, UNAIDS. [Opening Speech at the Commission on the Status of Women.](#)  
March 2, 2009.

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## **International Advocates Speak Out About Health and Human Rights for Sex Workers**

Women, men and transgender adults who work in the sex sector are among the most marginalized people throughout the world, and yet many are playing a leading role in demanding basic human rights, combating trafficking, and fighting HIV. To shape a more informed U.S. foreign policy that addresses the health and human rights of sex workers, CHANGE, in partnership with the Center for Human Rights and Humanitarian Law of American University's Washington College of Law, hosted four women from Cambodia, Mali, India, and Brazil in Washington, D.C., to speak out about the importance of sexual and reproductive health and human rights for sex workers around the world.

Sara Bradford of the [Asian-Pacific Network of Sex Workers](#) (APNSW) in Cambodia, Sylvia Mollet of [Danaya So](#) and [Lakana So](#) in Mali, Dr. Shilpa Merchant of [Population Services International](#) (PSI) in India, and Gabriela Leite of [Davida](#) in Brazil, met with policymakers, implementers, allies and advocates about the importance of supporting sex worker organizations in their efforts to eliminate HIV/AIDS and human trafficking. On Wednesday, March 18, CHANGE and Washington College of Law hosted a symposium titled "Human Trafficking, HIV/AIDS, and the Sex Sector," which was attended by more than 150 people. The symposium flyer is available by clicking [here](#).

Advocates spoke about how sex workers are organizing, collaborating with governments to combat human trafficking, starting banks and job training programs for women sex workers, ensuring access to education for their children, and partnering with health clinics to provide essential health care services. The advocates denounced the impact of the anti-prostitution pledge on sex worker empowerment programs and access to HIV treatment and even condoms for HIV prevention. To read more about the requirement that organizations receiving U.S. international HIV/AIDS funding sign an anti-prostitution pledge, and its implications for HIV prevention programs aimed at commercial sex workers, [download CHANGE's policy brief](#).

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## **Highlights from the Commission on the Status of Women**

Last year, CHANGE was granted roster consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), which allowed us to participate in the 53rd session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), held from March 2 -13 at the United Nations headquarters in New York City.

It was clearly a new day at the United Nations with the U.S. government delegation articulating a strong message in support of women's rights worldwide. Additionally, the new executive director of UNAIDS, Michele Sidibe, spoke strongly on the importance of women's rights and sexual and reproductive health in the fight against HIV and AIDS. CHANGE had the opportunity to meet with Sidibe in a meeting of a dozen global women's health and rights leaders, and we have already followed-up with him to support his efforts to make this a reality.

Also at the CSW, in conjunction with the [United Nations Population Fund](#) (UNFPA), the [AIDS Vaccine Advocacy Coalition](#), and several other UN agencies and NGOs, CHANGE organized a [side event](#) on March 3, about female and male condoms and women and men sharing responsibility for prevention. The session aimed to debunk the misconception that male condoms can only be used and initiated by men, and female condoms can only be used and initiated by women, and featured engaging presentations from the [Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States](#) (SIECUS), the [AIDS Vaccine Advocacy Coalition](#) (AVAC), and the [Women's Action Group of Zimbabwe](#) (WAG).

Additionally, CHANGE co-sponsored a side event about securing the rights and health of women and youth, including those living with HIV, with the [International Women's Health Coalition](#), the [International Planned Parenthood Federation - Western Hemisphere Region](#) and the [Center for Reproductive Rights](#). Panelists raised awareness about forced sterilization of HIV-positive women, and highlighted the need for programs that take comprehensive approaches to sexual and reproductive health and rights.

To a packed audience, Jamila Taylor of CHANGE spoke on a panel convened by the [United Nations Association - USA](#) about gender gaps in PEPFAR. One key issue raised by a participant is that we need an "Act Up" for prevention; namely, we need organized advocates who will fight loudly and boldly for HIV prevention for women, men and youth.

CHANGE staff blogs summarizing these CSW sessions can be found in the ["What's New"](#) section.

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### **Prevention Now: New Female Condom Approved by the U.S. FDA**

On March 11, 2009, [CHANGE praised the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's](#) (FDA) decision to approve the FC2 female condom, a second generation product manufactured by the Female Health Company. The FC2 has the same benefits, design, appearance and use as its predecessor, the FC1, but was designed to overcome some of the reported barriers faced by the first generation product. The FC2 female condom will also sell for about 30% less than the FC1.

CHANGE also received confirmation that USAID is ready to procure FC2 female condoms for U.S.-funded international HIV/AIDS programs as soon as a new contract is awarded. U.S. missions will be informed about the availability of the FC2 upon contract award. This has positive implications for getting prevention into the hands of women overseas, since there is potential for more female condoms to be procured, distributed and programmed.

FDA approval of a lower-cost female condom is great news, but sustained education and advocacy is essential to ensure that women and men in the U.S. and internationally know about the FC2, where to find or purchase the product, and how to negotiate its use.

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### **Foreign Assistance Reform: Informing the Process**

The House Committee on Foreign Affairs has begun holding roundtable discussions with key development, humanitarian, and global health stakeholders in efforts to inform the process to modernize U.S. foreign assistance. On February 11, CHANGE and other international family planning advocates met with committee staff to discuss reproductive health priorities in the reform process to ensure that a review of the 1961 Foreign Assistance Act includes consideration of the current state of the field, a comprehensive definition of reproductive health, and a more integrated approach to global health. See CHANGE's policy brief on foreign assistance reform at: <http://www.genderhealth.org/pubs/foreignassistancereform.pdf>.

Stakeholders have also sent an "Open Letter" to the Obama Administration and Congressional leaders regarding the importance of global development and foreign assistance reform. Led by the Modernizing Foreign Assistance Network (MFAN), the letter was signed by nearly 150 individuals and institutions, including CHANGE. The letter with list of endorsers can be accessed at: [http://www.modernizingforeignassistance.net/network/open\\_letter\\_to\\_obama.php](http://www.modernizingforeignassistance.net/network/open_letter_to_obama.php).

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### **Key Developments in U.S. Foreign Policy and Assistance**

President Obama began his administration in recognition of women's health and rights by rescinding the Mexico City Policy (Global Gag Rule) on his fourth day in office. On the same day, he also issued an executive memorandum directing the U.S. Congress to release funds to UNFPA that had been withheld by the Bush Administration since 2002. According to President Obama, "For too long, international family planning assistance has been a political wedge issue, the subject of a back and forth debate that has served only to divide us. I have no desire to continue this stale and fruitless debate...It is time that we end the politicization of this issue." See CHANGE's press release on the repeal of the Mexico City Policy by visiting: <http://genderhealth.org/pubs/pr2009.ggr.pdf>.

Melanne Verveer, former Chief of Staff to first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton and co-founder of the Vital Voices Partnership, was appointed by President Obama to serve in the new post of ambassador-at-large for global women's issues. On the Hill, a new subcommittee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee was also created for global women's issues. The Subcommittee on International Operations and Organizations, Human Rights, Democracy, and Global Women's Issues is the first of its kind in the history of U.S. Congress. The subcommittee will be chaired by an avid and vocal supporter of women's rights, [Senator Barbara Boxer](#).

International family planning and reproductive health assistance fared better than recent years during the FY 2009 appropriations cycle with its largest appropriated increase to date. The omnibus appropriations bill was signed by President Obama on March 11 and included \$545 million for international family planning and reproductive health. Fifty million dollars of these funds were appropriated for the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). Total funding for this fiscal year represented an increase of about \$87 million over FY 2008 levels. Total funding for HIV/AIDS (from all accounts) totaled \$5.5 billion, of which \$600 million was appropriated for multilateral assistance through the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB, and Malaria. HIV/AIDS funding received an increase of about \$900 million over FY 2008 levels.

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### What's New: CHANGE Publications

- **Policy Brief:** "[International Reproductive Health and Family Planning: U.S. Funding Priorities and Policy Implications](#)," Center for Health and Gender Equity, March 2009.
  - **Blog:** "[HIV-Positive and Forcibly Sterilized: A Chilling Reality](#)," Kimberly Whipkey, *Open Democracy*, March 5, 2009.
  - **Blog:** "[Female and Male Condoms: Whose Responsibility?](#)" Kimberly Whipkey, *RH Reality Check*, March 9, 2009.
  - **Blog:** "[The AIDS prevention policy that isn't working for women](#)," Jamila Taylor, *Open Democracy*, March 16, 2009.
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### Support CHANGE

Please consider making a donation today! Your support strengthens our efforts to ensure U.S. international policies and programs promote the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and girls worldwide. [Click here to donate](#).

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The Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE) is a U.S.-based non-governmental organization whose mission is to ensure that U.S. international policies and programs promote sexual and reproductive health and rights for women and girls worldwide.

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