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PRESS RELEASE

U.S. Shows the World it is a New Day in its Support for Universal Access to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Reproductive Rights *Center for Health and Gender Equity Applauds Renewal of U.S. Global Leadership*

(New York, NY)—Late yesterday, the U.S. government decisively broke from its recent past by reaffirming its “deep commitment” to “universal access to sexual and reproductive health and the protection and promotion of reproductive rights” at the 42nd Session of the Commission on Population and Development, at UN headquarters in New York. Women’s health and human rights advocates joined with world leaders in praising the U.S. statement.

“This bold affirmation of comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services and reproductive rights is a breath of fresh air for women and girls worldwide,” said Serra Sippel, executive director of the Center for Health and Gender Equity. “By rejecting the political games of the past eight years that used women’s health and rights as pawns, the Obama administration has clearly proclaimed a new day.”

Advocates were particularly pleased by the U.S. renewed commitment to life-saving, comprehensive approaches, including voluntary family planning “that provides full information and respects the client’s choices;” complete services during pregnancy and skilled care for birth; and linking HIV/AIDS activities with sexual and reproductive health, “given that 60-percent of people on PEPFAR-supported antiretroviral treatment are women, many of whom are in their reproductive years.”

The U.S. also called for a broad international effort “to provide comprehensive, accurate information and education on sexuality [and] sexual and reproductive health for women, men, girls, and boys as they age and their needs evolve.” This is particularly striking as it breaks from the previous administration’s restrictions on full information, such as its preference for abstinence-only programming in PEPFAR and its imposition of the Mexico City Policy, which limited information flow between health providers and their clients.

“We congratulate the Obama administration for its sophisticated, global perspective on these issues. With half a million women dying each year due to pregnancy and childbirth, and HIV growing rapidly among women and girls, we cannot afford to delay action,” Sippel urged. “We now look to Congress and the members of the administration to make the U.S. commitment to effective, comprehensive, and rights-based approaches to sexual and reproductive health a reality for women and girls around the world.”

The full U.S. statement is available here:

http://www.usunnewyork.usmission.gov/press_releases/20090331_064.html

For more information on the importance of comprehensive approaches to sexual and reproductive health and rights and U.S. policy see <http://www.genderhealth.org/pubs/foreignassistancereform.pdf>

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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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