

May 2, 2008

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
United States House of Representatives
H-232
U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi:

We, the undersigned organizations, thank you for your long history of support for and leadership on behalf of family planning programs around the world and urge you to support the inclusion of significant new funding and policy language to strengthen these programs in the FY '09 State Department, Foreign Operations Appropriations bill.

Specifically, we ask that you support a total of \$1 billion for family planning in the developing world, including \$63.5 million for the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). In addition, we urge you to include new policy language to ensure that the UNFPA funding is not withheld by the administration.

Few investments promise as positive a return as family planning. Real investment in family planning will improve maternal and child health, ease pressure on the environment and help build social and political stability in the developing world. Every additional \$100 million provided for family planning will allow 3.6 million additional women to use modern contraceptives and will result in: 2.1 million fewer unintended pregnancies; 825,000 fewer abortions; nearly a million fewer unplanned births; 70,000 fewer infant deaths; and, 4,000 fewer maternal deaths.

As you know, the United States was once a global leader in supporting family planning, but our contributions to international family planning programs over the past decade have been inadequate. Indeed, our nation is contributing significantly less than it did fourteen years ago. When inflation is considered, we are providing 40 percent less than we did in 1995.

At the same time, the number of women in the developing world who are at risk of unintended pregnancy continues to grow. Today, there are 200 million women who would like to limit or space pregnancies but have no access to modern methods of contraceptives. Demand for birth control is projected to increase by 40 percent in the next fifteen years. It's time for the United States to renew its commitment to make a real investment in family planning.

The return on this investment will be enormous. Every year, more than half a million women die of pregnancy related causes, and more than fifty million suffer serious complications. Nearly all of these deaths and injuries are preventable. In fact, universal access to contraceptives could prevent nearly half of all maternal deaths and a significant proportion of infant deaths. The link between expanded access to family planning and increased maternal and child survival has been proven over and over in countries in every part of the world.

In addition to improving the health of women and families, real investment in family planning will help to improve the global environment. Population growth continues to be a significant environmental challenge. Indeed, it is leading to the destruction of forests, the spread of deserts, the pollution and overfishing of oceans and waterways, and it is a major contributor to the climate change crisis. Failure to give people the ability to make their own choices about childbearing will make solutions to all of these challenges significantly more difficult to find.

Finally, improving the quality of life for women and their children will help to create stable and strong societies. Countries that lack the means to provide the most basic needs of their people – food, water, housing education, employment – are at significant risk of instability and conflict. In countries with significant unmet need for contraceptives, high fertility rates are leading to “youth bulges” – a high proportion of young people with little or no hope of education and employment.

To paraphrase former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, family planning builds stronger families, stronger communities and stronger countries. An investment of \$1 billion represents the United States fair share of the total cost of meeting the existing unmet need for family planning in the developing world and it is a good investment in a healthy future for all of us.

Thank you again for your history of leadership on this critical issue and we are looking forward to working with you as we move toward assuring universal access in the near future.

Sincerely,

Population Connection
NARAL Pro-Choice America
Population Action International
Sierra Club
Global Health Council
American Jewish World Service
United Methodist Church, General Board of
Church and Society
American Association of University Women
Sexuality Information and Education
Council of the U.S. (SIECUS)
The Centre for Development and Population
Activities (CEDPA)
Americans for UNFPA
Izaak Walton League of America
Population Services International
International Planned Parenthood
Federation/Western Hemisphere Region
National Council of Jewish Women
Jewish World Watch

Rabbinical Assembly
Jewish Reconstructionist Federation
Catholics for Choice
Planned Parenthood Federation of America
John Snow, Inc.
Pathfinder International
Center for Health and Gender Equity
Feminist Majority
International Women’s Health Coalition
National Family Planning and Reproductive
Health Association
National Partnership for Women & Families
American College of Obstetricians and
Gynecologists
The Center for Women Policy Studies
International Center for Research on
Women
Advocates for Youth
National Organization for Women
Ipas