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**TO:** Interested Parties  
**FROM:** Rachel Laser, Director of the Culture Program and Nikki Yamashiro, Policy Advisor  
**RE:** Repealing the Mexico City Policy: A Life-Affirming Action

U.S. foreign family planning aid is a life-affirming, common ground policy that transcends abortion but has unfortunately gotten caught in the political web of abortion politics.<sup>1</sup>

The “Mexico City” policy, reinstated in 2001, introduced sweeping restrictions for U.S. family planning funding for foreign nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).<sup>2</sup> These restrictions have produced a number of unintended consequences, including dire health outcomes in the world’s poorest countries from pregnancy-related deaths to the spread of HIV/AIDS. They have also had the troubling effect of increasing the number of abortions by denying basic access to contraception and thus increasing the rate of unintended pregnancy. Even President George W. Bush acknowledged these problems with the policy when he exempted funding for U.S. HIV/AIDS assistance from the Mexico City policy restrictions.<sup>3</sup>

It is time to disentangle U.S. foreign family planning aid from abortion politics and separate myths from facts. Reforming U.S. foreign family planning aid by **repealing the Mexico City policy is a life-affirming step.**

**Fact: The repeal would not fund abortion.**

Since 1973, the Helms Amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act has explicitly banned the use of U.S. taxpayer funds for abortions overseas.<sup>4</sup> Repealing the Mexico City policy would do nothing to change this. The Helms Amendment states:

*No foreign assistance funds may be used to pay for the performance of abortion as a method of family planning or to motivate or coerce any person to practice abortions.<sup>5</sup>*

**Fact: The repeal would reduce the number of abortions worldwide.**

A joint report by the Guttmacher Institute and the United Nations Population Fund estimated that providing family planning services to the 201 million women in developing countries whose needs are unmet would prevent 52 million unintended pregnancies and 22 million abortions annually.<sup>6</sup> Repealing the Mexico City policy would reduce the number of abortions worldwide by restoring desperately needed family planning services to some of the poorest countries in the world.

- The Planned Parenthood Association of Ghana provided family planning services to as many as 697,000 individuals. Their loss of funding as a result of



the Mexico City policy affected the ability of 1,327 communities in Ghana to prevent unintended pregnancies and abortion.<sup>7</sup>

**Fact: The repeal would prevent countless pregnancy-related deaths and illnesses worldwide.**

Over 99% of the estimated 536,000 women who die each year from pregnancy-related causes live in developing countries.<sup>8</sup> If family planning needs were met for all women in the developing world who do not have access to contraception, pregnancy-related deaths would drop by 25-35%.<sup>9</sup> Repealing the Mexico City policy would help save the lives of women worldwide by restoring needed family planning services.

- The Mexico City policy has led to the loss of USAID-supplied contraceptives in 16 developing countries throughout Africa, Asia and the Middle East.<sup>10</sup>

**Fact: The repeal would save the lives of countless children worldwide.**

In developing countries, the timing and spacing of pregnancies plays a significant role in children's health. For example, in Kenya, if women were able to better space their pregnancies, mortality rates for children under 5 years of age would fall by an estimated 17%.<sup>11</sup> Repealing the Mexico City policy would help save the lives of children worldwide by providing women with family planning services, enabling them to better space their pregnancies and deliver healthy children.

- As a result of the Mexico City policy, the Family Planning Association of Kenya (FPAK), the oldest and most established family planning NGO in Africa, was forced to close three clinics that had served an estimated 19,000 Kenyans. FPAK clinics, in addition to family planning services, provide prenatal, postnatal, and well baby care.<sup>12</sup>

**Fact: The repeal would fight the spread of HIV/AIDS and other STIs.**

Family planning NGOs play a key role in combating the spread of HIV/AIDS and other STIs in developing countries, saving the lives of countless men, women and children. Repealing the Mexico City policy would restore critical funding for HIV/AIDS and other STI prevention information and services.<sup>13</sup>

- Without intervention and at the current rate of infection, about half of the youth who are now age 15 in Zambia will likely die of AIDS.<sup>14</sup> The Planned Parenthood Association of Zambia, whose work includes reaching young people with information and services aimed at preventing the transmission of HIV/AIDS, has lost 24% of its funding and almost 40% of its staff as a result of the Mexico City policy.<sup>15</sup>

**Fact: The repeal would restore a wide range of health services.**

As a result of the Mexico City policy, clinics that provide a number of healthcare services, in addition to family planning services, are struggling and in some cases have closed.

- The loss of USAID funding resulted in the Family Planning Association of Kenya



(FPAK) and Marie Stopes International Kenya closing a number of clinics that provided pre- and post-natal care, child immunizations, infant and child check-ups, and malaria screening and treatment. FPAK is also Kenya's primary provider of Pap smear tests for cervical cancer.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Mexico City policy was first introduced by President Ronald Reagan in 1984 and was continued on by President George H.W. Bush. President Bill Clinton reversed the policy at the start of his presidency, January 22, 1993, and President George W. Bush reinstated it on his first working day in office, January 22, 2001. Congressional Research Service, "International Population Assistance and Family Planning Programs: Issues for Congress," September 2008.

<sup>2</sup> The Mexico City policy prohibits family planning funding from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to go towards foreign family planning NGOs that use any of *their own funds* to: provide abortion, except in cases of rape, incest or when the life of the mother is endangered; provide any services related to abortion, including counseling or referrals; or lobby to make or keep abortion legal in their own country. Congressional Research Service, "International Population Assistance and Family Planning Programs: Issues for Congress," September 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Population Action International, "What you Need to Know About the Global Gag Rule and U.S. HIV/AIDS Assistance," 2004.

<sup>4</sup> Congressional Research Service, "International Population Assistance and Family Planning Programs: Issues for Congress," September 2008; USAID, "Contract Information Bulletin 01-08 (R): Restoration of the Mexico City Policy — White House Memorandum for the Acting Administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development (Revised)," March 2001.

<sup>5</sup> Section 104(f) of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended; Annual Foreign Operations Appropriations Acts.

<sup>6</sup> Guttmacher Institute and UNFPA, "Adding It Up- The Benefits of Investing in Sexual and Reproductive Health Care," 2003.

<sup>7</sup> Population Action International, "Access Denied: Case Study Ghana," 2005.  
<http://www.populationaction.org/globalgagrule/Ghana.shtml>.

<sup>8</sup> World Health Organization, "Maternal Mortality in 2005," 2007.

<sup>9</sup> Sneha Barot, "Back to Basics: The Rationale for Increased Funds for International Family Planning," Guttmacher Policy Review, Vol.11, No.3, Summer 2008.

<sup>10</sup> Susan A. Cohen, "The Global Contraceptive Shortfall: U.S. Contributions and U.S. Hindrances," Guttmacher Policy Review, Vol.9, No.2, Spring 2006.

<sup>11</sup> Population Action International, "How Family Planning Protects the Health of Women and Children," May 2006.

<sup>12</sup> Population Action International, "Access Denied: Case Study Kenya," 2006,  
<http://www.populationaction.org/globalgagrule/Kenya.shtml>.

<sup>13</sup> World Health Organization, "Maternal Mortality in 2005," 2007

<sup>14</sup> U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, "Country Profile: Zambia," 2006.  
<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/61633.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> Population Action International, "Access Denied: Case Study Zambia," 2005,  
<http://www.populationaction.org/globalgagrule/Zambia.shtml>.

<sup>16</sup> Population Action International, "Access Denied: Case Study Kenya," 2006,  
<http://www.populationaction.org/globalgagrule/Kenya.shtml>.