

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Friday, October 3, 2008

New York, New York – We, as public health professionals working in the US and around the world, wish to release the following statement:

This week the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) took the unprovoked decision to force governments in six African countries to discontinue the provision of US-funded contraceptive commodities to Marie Stopes International (MSI), one of the world's leading family planning organizations.

We deplore this callous and politically questionable action.

This nearsighted maneuver will have direct and dire consequences for women in the affected countries – Ghana, Malawi, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe – and will translate almost immediately into increased maternal death and disability. Ironically, this news comes in the wake of renewed commitment to the United Nations' Millennium Development Goal 5 to improve maternal health on a global scale, declared at the UN summit in late September 2008.

In each affected country, MSI has worked within the national Ministry of Health's reproductive health policies and programs. The net effect of USAID's decision to limit contraceptive distribution, therefore, is to undermine national health systems that have been the focus of development efforts by USAID and others for decades.

We are certain that MSI will be swift in seeking other sources of contraceptive commodities, for reproductive health needs must be met. But at least in the short term, women who want – and are entitled to – these life-saving services will be denied.

We strongly urge USAID to reverse this action immediately.

Signed,

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