

NEWS RELEASE

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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Population Action International Joins European Partners in Condemning U.S. Government's Ban on Contraceptives to Africa

Washington, DC... The European NGOs for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, Population and Development (EuroNGOs) issued a statement today shocked about a recent decision by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). On October 1 it was revealed that USAID had issued instructions to its staff to pressure several African governments to discontinue provision of U.S.-funded contraceptives to Marie Stopes International (MSI), one of the world's leading family planning organizations. This is just the latest example of the Bush administration's hostility towards contraception and interference with constructive efforts to improve maternal health.

USAID Assistant Administrator for Global Health Kent Hill justified this decision because MSI works in China, by which he asserts that the nonprofit organization is guilty under the terms of the Kemp-Kasten amendment to have "support[ed] or participate[d] in the management of a program of coercive abortion or involuntary sterilization," even though there's no evidence to this accusation.

MSI does not support coercive practices in China or elsewhere. In fact, they have sought to play a positive role in helping to reform the Chinese government's program and to end the occurrence of human rights abuses.

MSI chief executive Dana Hovig said the USAID decision will "seriously disrupt" essential maternal healthcare and family planning services in at least six African countries – Ghana, Malawi, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe. More than half of MSI's services globally are directed to rural areas and underserved communities. Life-saving contraceptive supplies (including condoms) that have already been procured in these countries may now likely go to waste without the infrastructure of MSI to distribute them where they are needed.

The EuroNGOs statement urges their respective governments to challenge the decision, share objections with the U.S. government, and support the affected countries in rejecting this USAID pressure.

"Once again President Bush has shocked and disheartened the European community by playing politics with poor women's lives," said Amy Coen, President/CEO of PAI. *"This directive will prevent poor women in many African countries from accessing much needed pregnancy care and modern contraceptives – both important health services that we take for granted in the United States, but that are often out of reach for women in Africa."*

This last-ditch effort by the Bush administration to install regressive policies follows through on the veiled threat to expand the application of the Kemp-Kasten amendment to other organizations working in China, contained in the June determination by the State Department to withhold the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) contribution for this year. Buried in that statement announcing the continuing cut-off of funding for UNFPA was the following ominous warning: *"During the course of our evaluation of UNFPA's work, we learned of other organizations that conduct activities in China. The relevant funding agencies are conducting a comprehensive analysis to determine what appropriate and lawful actions can be taken."*

MSI does not currently receive any direct family planning assistance -- either funding or supplies -- from the U.S. government because of MSI's earlier principled refusal to be bound by the Global Gag Rule restriction, another destructive Bush administration policy. The latest action by USAID seeks to block even the most indirect of U.S. assistance from being provided to MSI. USAID is pushing the interpretation of the requirements of the Kemp-Kemp amendment to an extreme -- trying to block U.S. contraceptives supplied to sovereign governments, who should be able to allocate donated resources based upon needs at the local level, from being provided to MSI for distribution in their clinics.

For more information about the Bush administration's seven-year ban on UNFPA funding, please see PAI's June press release at:

http://www.popact.org/Press_Room/Press_Releases/2008/06_27_UNFPA_Kemp-Kasten.shtml.

Population Action International has experts on this issue that are available to discuss these policies and their impact. For more information or to arrange an interview with a PAI spokesperson, please contact Tyler LePard at 202.557.3422.