

Support International Family Planning and the UNFPA

While the U.S. is one of the largest donors to international family planning programs, countries with much smaller budgets than the U.S. give a greater percentage of their resources to family planning assistance. The United States contribution relative to its gross national income (GNI) is still far behind countries such as Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, and Belgium. Raise awareness about the importance of international family planning and current U.S. policies that compromise the effectiveness of aid being given.

Background Information

International family planning (IFP) includes reproductive health services, which covers prenatal and postnatal care, contraception, HIV/AIDS and STI education and prevention, and more. Family planning empowers women and families by giving them the resources and tools that they need to voluntarily plan when and whether to have children. It is beneficial for families worldwide, as it helps reduce maternal, infant, and child mortality rates, increases girls' and women's access to education, and helps to foster economic growth and political development. In addition, international family planning decreases the number of unplanned pregnancies, and subsequently, the incidence of abortion.

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has administered economic assistance programs—including funding international family planning programs—since 1961. USAID is the largest foreign assistance program in the world, but since January 22, 2001, the “Global Gag Rule” has been in effect: international family planning organizations have been denied funding if they provide information, counseling, or referrals about abortion services. Groups receiving U.S. funding are also prevented from lobbying their governments to reform laws. As a result of the legislation, many family planning organizations may have to close their doors because they stand to lose a significant portion of their total funding. Often, these are the same health care organizations that provide HIV/AIDS treatment and counseling, as well as other irreplaceable services. The Global Gag Rule applies even in countries where abortion is legal, and even if the organization uses their own, separate funds for abortion education or services. The Global Gag Rule is an infringement on free speech and would be unconstitutional in the United States. Ultimately, this policy leads to more unwanted pregnancies and illegal, unsafe abortions across the globe.

Since 1969, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has provided assistance to developing countries, at their request, to improve the quality of and access to reproductive health care, such as family planning, safe motherhood, and the prevention of sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS. It is a multilateral agency that does not represent any one country, but is funded by voluntary contributions, primarily from national governments. Since 2002, President George W. Bush has either blocked or redirected tens of millions of dollars in funding approved by Congress for the UNFPA based on false and unsubstantiated claims by anti-abortion extremists that the agency supports forced abortions in China. The blocked U.S. contribution to the UNFPA would make up 13% of the total funding for its international family planning programs every year—enabling the agency to prevent two million unwanted pregnancies, 4,700 maternal deaths, nearly 60,000 cases of maternal illnesses, and over 77,000 cases of infant and child mortality annually.

Take Action to Support International Family Planning and UNFPA!

- In your back-to-school mailer, you received a copy of **“the global majority...again,”** a film created by FMF Board Member Lorraine Sheinberg which explores how current U.S. foreign policy fosters conditions that increase global poverty and hunger, endangers the health of the people in developing nations, and contributes to the degradation of the environment worldwide. Screen the video and hold a discussion session to talk about the interconnectedness of global feminist issues and the repercussions of U.S. policies on people worldwide.
- **Educate on the devastating effects of the Global Gag Rule and the de-funding of the UNFPA;** table with FMF fact sheets on global feminist issues downloaded from www.feministcampus.org.
- **Encourage people to contact their members of Congress and tell them to support the re-funding of the UNFPA.** You can find contact information for your Senators and Representatives at www.feminist.org/action.