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20 years of advancing health, dignity and justice

October 24, 2008

Dr. Kent Hill
Assistant Administrator for Global Health
US Agency for International Development
RRB 3.06-072
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20523-3100

Dear Dr. Hill,

As leading medical and public health experts and members of Physicians for Human Rights, we are writing to express our concern at USAID's recent decision to force governments in six African countries to discontinue the provision of USAID-funded contraceptives to Marie Stopes International (MSI).

In our work throughout the world, we have seen first-hand the importance of ensuring that women have access to adequate family planning through accessible community-based clinics. The decision to discontinue the distribution of US-funded contraceptives to MSI in Ghana, Malawi, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe will increase maternal deaths, jeopardize the reproductive health of women and deny both women and men the decision of when or whether to have a child.

MSI is a reputable organization that works in partnership with African governments to increase voluntary, client-centered family planning services. The decision to limit access to US-funded contraceptives to women in Sub-Saharan Africa as a result of a baseless and inaccurate claim that MSI supports the Chinese government's support of coercive abortion and forced sterilization in China is illogical and dangerous to the lives of innocent women in Africa. It also undermines the decision-making authority and the planning of health ministries and governments in these six countries. African governments will struggle to find equivalent donations of contraceptives to fill the gap created by this decision.

Maternal and infant mortality and morbidity remain shockingly high in the African countries affected by this decision, especially in rural areas. Research shows that unmet family planning needs in these countries contribute to increased maternal and infant mortality and morbidity. MSI operates clinics in extremely rural areas in these African countries and frequently provides the only option for women in need of family planning support.

This decision, which is based on ideology and not on scientific evidence or best public health practice, sets a dangerous precedent and undermines USAID's role as a development and humanitarian assistance organization. We urge you to immediately reverse the decision to suspend access to US-funded contraceptives to MSI clinics in Sub-Saharan Africa. The health and human rights of millions of families in these six countries depend on it.

Sincerely,

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