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## **WOMEN'S HEALTH AND RIGHTS, MORE THAN EVER THREATENED**

The commitments made by the governments to support access to treatment and care, defense of human rights, fight against inequality, discrimination, vulnerability and violence - and the values that underpin them - are always measured in the light of health and women's rights. We are all reminded of this in celebrating women today, on the occasion of International Women's Day.

By placing women's health and rights at the heart of the Sustainable Development goals adopted in September 2015, the international community recognizes their power for development. Despite the incredible progress made in recent years in global health, progress for women's health remain insufficient.

- HIV / AIDS is the leading cause of death for women aged 15-44 worldwide and tuberculosis is among the top five causes of women death in this age bracket in low- and middle-income countries.

- Every week 7,500 women and girls aged 15-24 years, are infected with HIV. 60% of new HIV infections among 15-24 years old are contracted by girls and women. In HIV high burden countries, 80% of newly infected adolescents are girls.

- 35% of women worldwide have experienced intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence.

- 225 million women who do not wish to become pregnant, do not have access to modern contraception and family planning means. Every year, 74 million of unwanted pregnancies are counted in developing countries, which will result in 36 million of abortions and among them 21 million are unsafe generating about 13% of maternal deaths.

By reinstating the Global Gag Rule 101 on January 22, President Donald Trump directs the Secretary of State, the Administrator of USAID and the Secretary of Health and Human Services to take all necessary actions, to the extent allowable by law, to ensure that federal US public resources will not fund any organization or program supporting or participating in the management of coercive abortion or involuntary sterilization.

Consequently, any non-governmental US organization financed by federal funds, not only for family planning but also for global health, HIV / AIDS and maternal and child health may not provide nor promote services relevant to abortion or providing abortion as a method of family planning, nor inform nor advocate for such measures on both US and foreign soil. This prohibition applies to the entire activity of these organizations regardless of their source of funding. Should these organizations not comply with these prescriptions, they would lose all

the resources from federal US funds, including those dedicated to the provision of condoms or modern contraceptives for women.

Those restrictions deny the major effects of sexual and reproductive health on women's health, global health and development.

By increasing unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions, and maternal and child deaths, this decision endangers years of hard-won gains, not only from reproductive and maternal health, but also from the fight against HIV / AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections, as well as child health.

When a woman is able to choose the number of pregnancies, spacing between two births, she can better manage her resources and give her children better nutrition, better health and a better education. Giving children a better chance to live better is the right way to fight poverty.

Such restrictions alter the living forces of development. They destroy entire sections of global and community health services, expertise, know-how, and partnerships that are so difficult to build on.

Finally and even more severely, by limiting women's rights, autonomy, ability to economically empower themselves and to support the development of their communities, they help to keep countries and populations in poverty.

The international community cannot ignore the consequences of these provisions and their impact on global health and development. It must mobilize any additional resources to continuously and sustainably provide all women and girls with the indispensable services that guarantee health, autonomy and rights.

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