

**Canberra Times**  
**25/01/2002**

### **Bush denying women's rights**

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UNITED States President George W. Bush has just put on hold \$US34 million (\$A65 million) of funding to the United Nations Fund for Population Activities, money which had been agreed to by Congress as part of a foreign appropriations Bill ratified by both Houses last month.

The likely reason for the deferment is that Bush is under pressure from right-wing anti-abortionists who say the UNFPA supports forced abortion and sterilisations in China.

The reality of the decision is that the Bush administration is denying women and their families around the world access to the family-planning services and contraceptive supplies that are available to everybody in his own country.

This action will result in the undermining of the work of an inter-government organisation which is implementing programs with and for governments and all approved in a democratic manner at numerous international conferences.

As well as overruling Congress, the decision ignores the reality of UNFPA's work. The fund does not provide support for abortions or abortion-related activities anywhere in the world. Neither does it promote or support involuntary sterilisation or coercive practices of any kind. It is unequivocally opposed to targets and quotas, including China's one-child policy.

In fact, its presence in countries like China encourages better family-planning practices and ensures that coercion is seen as not only unnecessary but wrong.

Before agreeing to its current assistance to 32 counties in China, UNFPA insisted that China agree to adhere in those counties to the principles contained in the program of action decided in 1994 by the International Conference on Population and Development. In particular, the Chinese authorities agreed to abolish all quotas and targets in those counties. Thus Bush's decision is putting in jeopardy the very programs that are ensuring that coercive practices are eliminated.

Over the last decade, the UNFPA has taken the unusual step of providing accounting information to the US to show that not one cent of US money is spent in China. Thus the impact of the President's decision will not be felt in China. It will be felt in the poorest and neediest countries, including Afghanistan, which desperately need family-planning services and contraceptive supplies.

In recent times, Bush has stressed his support for women's rights as human rights, in the context of the conflict in Afghanistan. It is estimated that the loss of US funding could undermine the UNFPA's capacity to prevent 800,000 abortions and the deaths of 4700 mothers and 77,000 children under the age of five. It will also jeopardise UNFPA's international AIDS-prevention programs.

Where is his support for women's rights now? The fact is, quality family-planning programs significantly reduce the incidence of abortion and provide a better quality of life for women and their families.