

Australian Reproductive Health Alliance calls on the Rudd Government to abolish the AusAID Family Planning Guidelines as President Obama repeals the Global Gag Rule

The Australian Reproductive Health Alliance (ARHA) welcomes President Barack Obama's removal of the contentious Mexico City Policy, the Global Gag, which prevents non-government organisations from using US dollars to either educate about unsafe abortion, or provide safe abortions, overseas.

President Obama yesterday signed an executive order to remove the Global Gag.

The Global Gag was introduced by President Reagan in 1984, rescinded by President Clinton and then reinstated by President Bush.

AusAID's Family Planning Guidelines mimic the Global Gag. Under AusAID's Guidelines no information about unsafe abortion can be given and no service provided even in countries where abortion is legal. Funding for family planning has decreased from \$6.8 million in 1995/6 to \$2.28 million in 2006/7 since their introduction. Family planning funding in the Australian aid budget has decreased by 84% from 1995 to 2007 (0.44% to 0.07% of total aid).

ARHA CEO Jane Singleton says, "We in Australia should not deny the rights we have to women in the developing world where those rights are within the law. In PNG alone maternal death rates have increased by more than 56% over the last few years according to UN statistics."

"Across the world half a million women are dying every year in pregnancy and from related complications. It is estimated that children whose mothers have died are 3 to 10 times more likely to die within two years than those who have both parents alive. Girls, in particular, suffer because they are forced to drop out of school to look after younger siblings when their mother dies."

"This is not about providing abortions in countries where it is illegal but providing full access to family planning and education about unsafe abortion and where abortion is legal, to safe abortion."

Unsafe abortions cause 13 per cent of all maternal deaths worldwide, many in our own region. A reduction in maternal deaths cannot be achieved without access to information on safe (in countries where abortion is legal) and unsafe abortion.

Australia is now the only country in the world to limit overseas aid funds in this way. The Guidelines are in conflict with Australia's commitment to the World Health Organisation protocols and the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs has the power to strike out the Family Planning Guidelines which are embedded in AusAID policy, not in legislation or regulation.

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ARHA's mission is to promote public support for enhanced reproductive and sexual health in Australia and internationally, and to promote the advancement of the status of women and girls.