



# THE WATCHDOG

The Youth Coalition's Quarterly Newsletter

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## UN NUEVO AÑO DE ABOGACIA...

By Claudia Ahumada (Chile)

Aqui en Chile, muchos dicen que el año recién empieza en marzo...la gente vuelve a Santiago, se acaban las vacaciones, empiezan las clases, el trabajo, etc. Yo, por mi parte, no sé si eso es cierto, pero lo que si tengo claro es que, si no empezo ya, ¡ahora si que si!

Prueba de ello es que del 10 al 11 de marzo se realizará en Santiago la reunión conocida como "ECLAC", en que oficiales de la Comisión sobre Población y Desarrollo, de Naciones Unidas, se reunirán, y los gobiernos de la region emprenderán negociaciones a partir de los acuerdos logrados en la Conferencia Internacional de Poblacion Desarrollo y la Plataforma de Accion que surgió de la misma.

Pero, esta reunión no es importante sólo para los gobiernos, sino que para todas y todos nosotros, incluidos, pos supuesto, la juventud. Los documentos que se negociarán dicen relación con nuestro bienestar y con nuestros derechos, y, ¿cómo no vamos a tener algo que decir al respecto? Las y los jóvenes tenemos una contribución que hacer a la sociedad, estamos informados y tenemos algo que decir. ¡Y lo diremos! Entre otros, en la reunión a realizarse del 10 al 11 de marzo.

¡Nos vemos allí!



youth coalition

Working Internationally for Sexual and Reproductive Rights

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## My Experience at the Asia Pacific Youth Advocacy Workshop

By Qaisar Ismail, CRY, Pakistan



Participant Qaisar Ismail and his fellow participants at the Asia-Pacific Workshop

*Qaisar Ismail is one of the nineteen young people that participated in the Asia-Pacific Youth Advocacy Workshop, held December 5 – 13, 2003, in Bangkok Thailand. The workshop was organized by the Network for Asia Pacific Youth and Youth Coalition. Qaisar is from Peshawar, Pakistan, and is one of the co-founders of an organization called CRY – the Coalition on the Rights and Responsibilities of Youth.*

It was a great pleasure for me when I heard that my application for participation in the Asia Pacific Youth Advocacy Workshop" was approved. However, it was not easy to get there. When I first applied for a Thai visa in Islamabad, I was sure that I would not be able to get it because the application process was lengthy and the visa officer's behavior was not good towards me. Initially

(Continued on page 2)



*(My Experience... Continued from page 1)*

I was discouraged but the support of the Youth Coalition staff in Canada give me the life to participate in the workshop, and with their help I was successful in getting the Thai visa.

During my flight I had a lot of questions rising in my mind about how everyone would be, whether or not they would be helpful, whether or not they encourage me, and thinking that all would be strangers to me. But when I reached the hotel and met the organizers, I did not feel like they were strangers at all. I felt like I knew them for a long time, and when I went for dinner with two of the facilitators, I felt like they were my close friends.

Here is a short summary of the workshop:

**December 8:** The first day, all the participants were introduced to each other. The first activity was really a great way to get to know each other one because participants were put in groups of two and were to draw their pictures and introduce each other. Later we presented our own country's profile, and then regional profiles. I had the chance to present South Asia to the rest of the group. I learned a lot about the problems faced by young people in other countries and regions.

**December 9:** To start off, the last day proceedings were presented by the participants. Then we did a very helpful activity where we identified the key issues of the region. We were then given an introduction to Gender and the Rights Based Approach to programming.

After the topic of the "multiple roles of youth" was then presented in a really good way as a game by one of the facilitators. He asked us to hold our documents in one hand, a chair in other hand and stand on one foot. He then asked us to walk around the room, but no one was able to. He explained that as youth we have many roles and young people have a hard time balancing all our roles. This activity really raised my interest in this topic.

At the end of the day we were discussed sexual and reproductive rights (SRR). We defined SRR together, and by the end I learned a lot about the different definitions of SRR.

**December 10:** On December 10 another participant from India and I presented the last day proceedings. We presented it like a newsletter on Television, and we named it "DON'T WATCH DOG" (a play on the YC newsletter), which was really appreciated. We were then given an introduction to the International Conferences on Population and Development (ICPD) and ICPD+5.

The next topic we worked on was advocacy and its various processes and issues. We looked at advocacy at the national, sub-regional and regional levels. I found this topic especially helpful.

At night we had an "international night" where we wore in our national dress and shared snacks and food from different countries represented at the workshop..

**December 11:** The group continued to work on advocacy today. We looked at international advocacy more closely, and spent the day learning about the UN and its functions.

**December 12:** On the final day our main activity was a role-play where we all participated as presenters of the different member states of the UN.

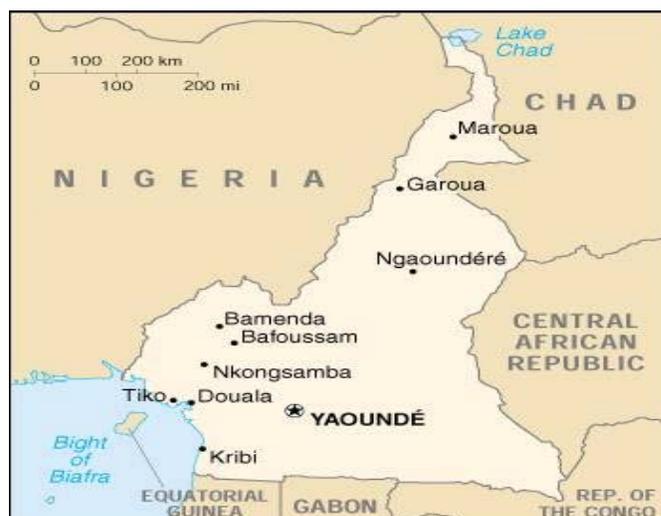
In the afternoon we were given a tour of the Grand Palace, and the workshop ended with a dinner cruise which I will never forget.

There was some confusion about the date of my plane ticket, but on this day I came to know that I had to leave for my country in the late evening. I was feeling sad because I was to leave so many

## **Violence Against Women in Cameroon: A Legal Perspective**

*By Che Didian Anye  
President*

*Coalition for the Promotion of Peace  
Research and Intellectual Freedom in Africa*



The constitution of Cameroon does not explicitly forbid discrimination based on race, language, or social status. The constitution prohibits discrimination based on sex and mandates that "everyone has equal rights and obligations," but the government does not enforce these constitutional provisions effectively.

Violence against women remains at high levels. Women's rights advocates report that the law does not impose effective penalties against men who commit acts of domestic violence. There are no gender-specific assault laws, despite the fact that women are the predominant victims of domestic violence. Spousal abuse in Cameroon is not a legal ground for divorce. In cases of sexual assault,  
*(Continued on page 4)*



# Sexual Education for Youth and Adolescents in Argentina

By Maria Eugenia Miranda (Argentina)

If you were to ask a young Argentinean woman today about her sexual and reproductive rights, the most likely answer will be silence or an expression demonstrating that she doesn't know what you are talking about. The lack of information is alarming, adolescents don't perceive themselves as subjects of rights, and the most bizarre rumors regarding sexuality run from one place to the other.

"I speak about sexuality only with my friends, never with my parents or at school. Once promoters for hygienic materials came to my school and spoke a while about menstruation and the changes that our bodies would be experiencing at that period in our lives, but nothing else", says Marcela Diaz, a 14 year-old secondary student. "The thing is that we usually have little information and we deal with rumors and myths. I know a girl for example who got pregnant the first time that she had sex. She didn't use any protection because she thought, as many girls do, that if it is your first time you can't get pregnant". Sexual education is formally included in the official curricular contents of Argentine schools, but in the majority of the cases it's not taught. Moreover, the majority of the catholic schools are completely opposed to sexual education.



Illustration courtesy of ISIS International Manila, Artist: Joanne de Leon

## National network of Adolescents:

Cecilia Correa a psychologist, is 29 years-old, and, the coordinator for the National Network of Adolescents on Sexual and Reproductive Health of Argentina, which brings together different organizations and groups of young people in the country who work on these topics. The network was created in 1999 by an initiative of a NGO and a group of adolescents trained as peer educators in sexuality, prevention of sexual transmitted infections, and teenage pregnancies. "The idea of the network is to work together to promote the activities of young people in defense of their sexual and reproductive rights through; information and diffusion campaigns, our website [www.rednacadol.org](http://www.rednacadol.org), our training workshops on these topics, and promoting new peer educators", explains Cecilia. This year, the network will have its third national meeting, where all the members within the country will meet to debate which steps should be followed in the near future, whether or not to incorporate new groups, and they will participate in training workshops held at every national meeting. "The activities done through the network have a bigger impact at the national level than the individual works do", comments Cecilia, and she adds: "It is important to work as a whole and with youth, not just in to guarantee the sexual education of children and adolescents, but also to respect our right to adopt a sexual and reproduction lifestyle free and informed".

Cecilia believes that sexual education must be given at schools, hospitals, and in poorer neighborhoods to help avoid unplanned pregnancies, and to prevent sexually transmitted infections such as HIV/AIDS. She also believes that it is essential that sexual and reproductive health services be provided at no cost. "As soon as the person knows how to protect themselves by going to a doctor and getting information about different methods of contraception, they must be able to have access to the different products without having to pay". This idea could be in the future part of a newly approved law on reproductive health and responsible procreation, it hasn't been completely implemented into the law yet because there are still difficulties in obtaining free contraceptives at public hospitals. Cecilia concludes: "For me, it's very important that young people mobilize themselves and take concrete actions in favor of our sexual and reproductive rights, even if we can not count on the support of some sectors of society, such as the State, or the Church".



*(Violence Against Women... Continued from page 2)*

a victim's family or village often imposes direct, summary punishment on the suspected perpetrator through extralegal means ranging from destruction of property to beating. While there is no reliable statistics on violence against women, the large number of newspaper reports - a fraction of actual incidents - indicates that it is widespread.

Despite constitutional provisions recognizing women's rights, women do not, in fact, enjoy the same rights and privileges as men. The civil law theoretically provides equal status and rights for men and women in Cameroon. However, no legal definition of discrimination exists, and some points of civil law are prejudiced against women. The 1981 civil code allows a husband to oppose his wife's right to work in a separate profession if the protest is made in the interest of the household and the family. While the law gives a woman the freedom to organize her own business, the commercial code allows a husband to end his wife's commercial activity by notifying the clerk of the commerce tribunal of his opposition based upon the family's interest. Partly for this reason, some employers require a husband's permission before they hire a woman. Law and tradition permit polygamy, but not polyandry. In cases of divorce, the husband's wishes determine the custody of children over the age of 6. While a man may be convicted of adultery only if the sexual act takes place in his home, a female may be convicted without respect to venue.

Customary law is far more discriminatory against women than civil law, given that a woman is customarily regarded as the property of her husband in many regions. Because of the importance attached to customs and traditions, laws protecting women often are not respected. Despite a law that fixes a minimum age of 15 years for a bride, many girls are forced to marry by their families at the age of 12. In the customary law of some ethnic groups, husbands not only maintain complete control over family properties but also can divorce their wives in a traditional court without being required to provide either verifiable justification or alimony. The extent to which a woman may inherit from her husband normally is governed by traditional laws in the absence of a will, and customs vary from group to group in Cameroon. In many traditional societies, custom grants greater authority and benefits to male than to female heirs. Another problem facing women is forced marriage; in some regions, girl's parents can and do give them away in marriage without their consent. Often, a bride's parents are paid a "bride price" by the husband, who is sometimes many years older than the girl. Since a price has been paid, the girl is considered the property of the husband. When a married man dies, his widow is often unable to collect any inheritance, since she herself is considered part of the man's property. The question is: how can property own other property? In legal terms, how can a chattel own another chattel? The widow often is forced to marry one of the deceased's brothers. Refusal means that she must repay the bride price in full (she usually has no source of funds) and leave the family property. In the northern provinces of Cameroon, some traditional rulers reportedly prevent their wives and concubines from ever leaving their palaces. In short, the lack of a national legal code covering the family leaves women and mostly young girls defenseless against customs that

favour males. Such circumstances encourage gender-based violence, leading to fertile ground for the spread of HIV/AIDS.

### Health Consequences

Research carried out in Cameroon has shown that women who suffer from gender-based violence have been found to be at greater risk of contracting HIV/AIDS. This is because women who experience such violence often refuse to have sex with their partners, facing the risk of being physically abused and raped by their partners as a result. Ms. Angela Dwamena Boakye, the Executive Director of the Ark Foundation, noted at a training workshop on gender violence and HIV/AIDS at Koforidua in September of this year that although a lot of work is being done in generating HIV/AIDS awareness, there has not been much focus on the link between gender violence and HIV/AIDS.

The socio-economic impact of HIV/AIDS has been enormous, especially amongst women in Cameroon, who have been disproportionately affected by the epidemic. The demographic figures indicate that women get exposed to HIV infections much earlier than men. Therefore it is accurate to conclude that the spread of the infection is facilitated by many social inequalities especially gender-based inequalities. This, in turn, reflects and reinforces these inequalities.

It is high time for advocacy-based civil society organizations to emerge in Cameroon, Africa and the world, so that the rights of women and children can be protected. Such organizations are necessary for the provision of integrated support service to victims of gender violence and child abuse. By so doing they would be pressuring governments to create an improved legal code that promotes sexual and reproductive rights.

### Is This Honor?

By Athar Khan (Pakistan)

On the 12<sup>th</sup> of November, 2003 a young girl named Afsheen Musarrat was killed by her father when she told the her family that she was going to marry her cousin with or without the consent of her family members. This incident happened on account of family honor which is prevalent in Pakistani society and which to a greater extent overshadows basic human rights. Such cases are seen day to day in this part of the world and law enforcement agencies are not taking any measures to prevent these incidents from taking place.

Women's rights are being ruthlessly violated in Pakistan. They are discriminated against openly and without recourse. Now the civilized world is fac-

*(Continued on page 6)*



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## European Youth in Action!

### ***News from YouAct, a European youth network on Sexual and Reproductive Rights***

In this article I would like to inform you about 'YouAct', a new youth network in Europe on sexual and reproductive rights in Europe.

In 2001 the Dutch Council on Youth and Population, which is now called Choice, noticed the need for a progressive voice of European youth and started to work out the idea of a European youth network. The idea was launched, contacts were made and finally a temporary steering committee (TSC) consisting of 8 young people became a reality in August 2003. All members are between 20 and 25 and have diverse experience in Sexual and Reproductive Rights (SRR) and Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH); such as peer education, lobbying, advocacy, outreach and research. I have the honour to be one of these members, representing the Netherlands. For the moment we have met 3 times and another meeting is scheduled for March.

From the 26th until the 29th of September the TSC had its first meeting in the Netherlands to establish a strategic plan and a charter. It was very motivating to work together on issues we all stand for, but also meeting each other since we all have different backgrounds and face different realities in our countries. Sharing our experiences emphasized the need for a European youth network. Imagine the bad access to contraceptives and legal abortions in Poland and the discrimination of homosexuals in Romania, but also in the Netherlands and Finland we face a decrease in condom use and an increasing number of STIs.

After this first meeting we have managed to receive funding from the Summit Foundation for two more meetings.

During the weekend 22-23 November the TSC met for the second time and worked on the development of the network. The charter and basic structure of YouAct were finalised and we started the preparations for the official launch of the network. In addition, partnerships with ASTRA and EuroNGOs were discussed and subsequent meetings have been arranged to finalise these supportive relationships. This meeting was concluded with a training on fundraising, which has been very useful.

From the 4th till the 9th of January 2004 we met in Geneva and participated in a training course on advocacy, facilitated by the Youth Coalition and Marie Stopes International.

The training covered among others the main UN-conferences and documents, message development, working with the media and developing two advocacy strategies for YouAct. The training was followed by two days of organizational development of YouAct. With support and guidance from the Youth Coalition facilitators, the TSC worked on the constitution of YouAct and a strategic plan for the next six months. Following to this, some of our members attended the European Population Forum.

The official launch of YouAct will take place in May. This event will take place during a youth conference on SRR, which the TSC organises in Portugal. The conference will include presentations on SRR of young people and the situation in the different regions in Europe, introduction and history of YouAct, workshops on youth participation and youth-adult partnership, opposition in the field of SRR and advocacy. Young Europeans, below the age of 28, who are active in the field are invited to participate in this conference.

I must say that I'm very excited about our network. It is a great experience to work with other young people on a common issue. At this very moment the need for a progressive voice of young people is more obvious than ever, with the strong conservative voices that threaten the Cairo Program of Action and our SRR in general. Young people are the key to the realisation of SRR and the improvement of our SRH!

If you want more or more detailed information about YouAct, please don't hesitate to contact the secretariat. Also if you are a young European or you know young people who might want to attend the youth conference and/or become a member of YouAct, you can contact the secretariat and we will make sure all the information you need will be sent to you!

Hope to hear from you, kind regards,

Zaire van Arkel,  
The Temporary Steering Committee of YouAct



( Is this honor? Continued from page 4)

ing another dilemma; honor killings where innocent women are killed mercilessly in the name of family honor. Within the region, an allegation against a woman that she has had an “inappropriate relationship” with a man outside of her own family can drive family members to kill her in the name of family “repute”. Honor killings are very complex and have wide meanings.

Women are considered to be a sign of honor and prestige in a family. If a woman is seen to act in a wrong way, either willingly or unwillingly, then the family considers the woman to have brought shame to the family name and has by all accounts stigmatized the family with her behavior. For these families a woman can bring shame to them and be killed by;

- Having an inappropriate relationship with a male outside her own family; whether the relationship is sexual or not. An “inappropriate” relationship is a relationship between a woman and a man whom is not her relative.
- Doubt or allegations against the character of the woman
- Expressing her likes or dislikes in regard to marriage
- Marrying without the permission of her family
- Demanding a divorce or Khula (legal separation) without the permission of the family members.

Killing a woman in the name of honor is a practice that can be found in many sections of Pakistani society, especially in the North West Pakistani Frontier and Baluchistan. In these areas there are a variety of reasons why a woman would be killed. For example if a girl goes against her parents wishes in respect to marriage then she can be tortured or even killed. It is thought that women should not marry for any other reason than to secure her family’s property and place in society. In many regions women are sold for this purpose. This tradition can especially be seen in Afghan society. In carrying out a survey for the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, I would ask Afghan families “Why do you sell your daughters and how do you determine her price?” and they would answer “They (women) can live in a house proudly if they are sold at a high price, prices are based on the caste system. A girl belonging to a high caste has a very high price.”

In Pakistan in cases of honor killings are not reported to the local police. Filing a report can be complicated and intricate. The burden of proof for honor killing cases to be tried in court is so great that they are often never prosecuted. Many times the accused knows the judge or other law officials and the case then becomes compromised because of conflict of interest.

There are many ways in which to reduce the number of honor killings in Pakistan;

- Policy makers should create more laws to protect women and eliminate discriminatory laws in order to help safeguard vulnerable segments of the society
- Awareness campaigns, such as training seminars and workshops, should be launched at all levels of society to motivate and educate people about women’s rights

### **Overlooked: young men and their struggle with HIV/AIDS**

*Sent from Angella Rwash, from Hope After Rape, Uganda.*

Great emphasis has been put on the infection rates of the young women and most of the attention paid to HIV/AIDS goes towards the protection of young girls and women who have been exposed to or are living with the disease. However, this has come at the expense of addressing many of the problems still faced by young men. Due to this lack of attention, young men have been neglected in terms of information accessibility, care, counseling and guidance. Women living with HIV/AIDS have seen the reality of this neglect towards the needs of men through the deaths of our spouses. Information that exists is geared towards women, leaving many men feeling overlooked.

Young people between the ages of 15-24 constitute 60% of the new infections, and the infection rate of girls is 6 times greater than that of young men. These are just some of the facts that have come to overshadow the vulnerability of young men, and risks that they face in this era of HIV/AIDS. Society tends to treat young men as if they are excluded from the devastating effects of HIV/AIDS. However this is not true. Because of unequal relationships between men and women, men often decide when and how often to have sex and whether or not to use a condom. Therefore, not only do young men represent a large part of the population, but as they mature, they will play a key role in the future of the epidemic through their attitudes and behavior.

In order to bring more attention to the problems that young boys and men share we must first examine some of

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(Overlooked... Continued from page 6)

the causes of that make this section of the population so vulnerable to the disease.

Some of the factors that make young men vulnerable to HIV/AIDS:

### 1. LACK OF GUIDANCE:

With shifting parental roles, responsibilities of men and women have changed. Mothers try to talk to their male children, but often do not because they feel that it is the father's role to educate their sons. However fathers are often occupied with other things to be concerned about child upbringing. Care and protection is often given to the female children because they are seen as the ones in danger. They face the possibilities of becoming pregnant or of sexual assault. As a result young men get the impression that there is nothing to worry about or that they do not face the same risks of infection. These feelings of invincibility give boys and young men a false sense of security and allow them engage in reckless behavior that often leads to infection.

### 2. MASCULINITY/ ATTITUDE OF MEN AND SOCIETY:

Notions of masculinity are associated with bravery, physical and psychological strength, independence and sexual activity. Parents often watch their sons bearing a lot of pain that they cannot express. Boys and young men often do not seek support even when faced with situations such as Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) and HIV/AIDS. They are afraid to go for counseling or medical care. The higher the number of young girls with whom a young man has had sexual relations the more prestigious it is considered.

### 3. SUGAR MUMMIES/ POVERTY:

Sugar mummies are older women who give money and presents to young men in exchange for a sexual relationship. The young men derive prestige from such relationships and want to show that they are capable of having affairs with these older women. However, having the affairs with older more experienced women and being able to have nice material belongings often comes at the expense of their lives. Because young men in impoverished communities face such problems as lack of education and unemployment, older women can use their economic power to control them. In these circumstances it is difficult to guarantee that the young man will have the strength and bargaining power to negotiate for safer sex.

### 4. SOCIAL RELATIONSHIP:

Some organizations are now realizing the importance of involving boys and men in their programs. For example at the Ugandan National Community of Women Living with HIV/AIDS offer sessions for children. Boys are often asked to share their thoughts on what they fear to tell or discuss with their parents. However, in many cases parents do not know that their children are sexually active and the boys fear disappointing their parents by asking for help. When and if they decide to visit a health center, the boys often feel embarrassed to undress in front nurses. To avoid this 'humiliation' they often resort to remedies that they learn from their peers. This leads to exposure to HIV infection as a result of untreated or partially treated Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs).

### 5. ALCOHOL AND DRUGS:

Alcohol and drugs have become readily available to many young men. These have the power to inhibit rational thought and lead many sexually active males into making an unwise decision concerning sex. Many drugs, such as heroin, are taken intravenously and the practice of sharing needles is now common place.

### 6. WAR AND CONFLICT:

Uganda's population has grown up seeing war, and it is always the younger men who go to off to fight. During wartime there are many cases of reported rape of women. If the young men find someone willing to have consensual sex they often do not to practice safe sex.

### 7. THE MEDIA:

Media portrayal of young men is at times unfair. In cases where it is a younger man and an older women it is still up to the male to make the safer choices even if the girl is older and more informed. Media sympathy at this time is given to the girl regardless of the circumstances thus painting a biased picture of males.

### WHAT CAN BE DONE TO HELP YOUNG MEN?

Because of the fears that many men have and because of the factors influencing their behavior, I recommend the following:

- Family education should be given to the boys just as it is to girls
- Sex education be intensified in schools so that boys can know the dangers of HIV/AIDS
- Our laws that portray men as aggressors should accommodate situations where men are being put at risk of older women taking advantage of them for sexual purposes.
- Peer education to make men respect their peers.
- Media should give a balanced treatment to **both men and women**. Without each other no one can succeed single handedly in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

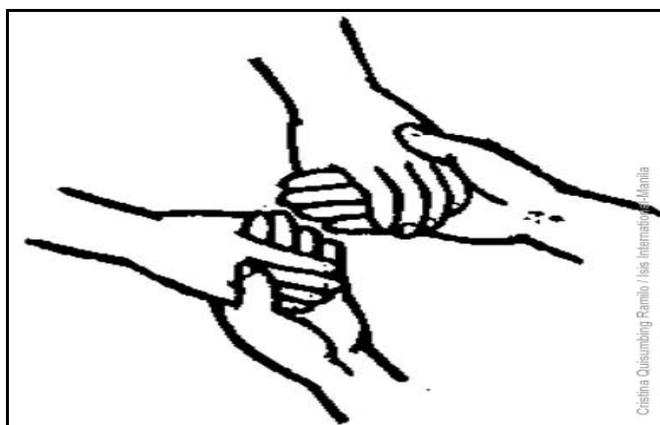


Illustration courtesy of ISIS International Manila,  
Artist: Cristina Quisumbing Ramilo



# FreeChoiceSavesLives.org

## What is the Global Gag Rule?

The Global Gag Rule is a policy that denies crucial USAID (U.S. Agency for International Development) support to foreign groups (NGOs) that do any of the following things: counsel clients on abortion, refer clients for abortion, or lobby their own governments to either make abortion legal or easier to obtain in their countries.

By cutting funding to agencies that refuse to comply, the Global Gag Rule limits choice and makes it harder for women and girls to get access to routine reproductive and maternal health care. The Gag Rule also puts up roadblocks in the global effort to stop the spread of HIV/AIDS.

## Making Pregnancy More Dangerous

Every minute, a woman dies in pregnancy or childbirth. Family planning could save at least 25% of these women's lives by preventing high-risk pregnancies; but thanks to the Gag Rule, many clinics have been forced to cut their staff, limit their services or close their doors entirely. For example, three clinics of the Family Planning Association of Kenya have been forced to close, one in a poor area of Nairobi with no other health services available.

Those clinics that do remain open have lost their access to valuable contraceptives donated by USAID and are often unable to afford more supplies. All too often, pregnant women, babies and mothers pay the price for this dangerous policy. Pregnancy and childbirth become unnecessarily dangerous without family planning services, adequate prenatal care, and trained birth attendants.

## Increasing the Risk of Unsafe Abortions

Almost 20 million unsafe abortions occur each year, almost all in developing countries, according to estimates of the World Health Organization. And every year, more than 75,000 women and girls die from

complications due to unsafe abortions, often

leaving helpless newborns and older children behind. Millions more suffer serious illness and permanent injury from these botched procedures.

Well over 100 million women alive today will experience the risk and trauma of an unsafe abortion at least once in their lifetimes. Ironically, although the Gag Rule claims to be limiting abortions overseas, it actually increases the number of unsafe abortions by failing to provide sufficient contraceptive services and by limiting access to safe abortions in countries where they are legal. The key to maternal health lies in improving access to family planning and maternal health care, rather than limiting it.

Groups that refuse to comply with the Gag Rule lose more than just funding. Agencies that reject the Gag Rule also lose access to valuable contraceptive supplies, including condoms, donated by USAID. The overall effect is more unplanned pregnancies and hence more abortions, as well as a higher rate of HIV/AIDS transmission for people in the developing world.

## HIV/AIDS - Creating a Deadly Dearth of Condoms

Health care agencies that refused to sign the Gag have lost access to contraceptive supplies donated by USAID, including condoms, as well as funding. Often these groups cannot afford to purchase condoms to give out to the public, leaving adolescents and adults at an increased risk of contracting HIV/AIDS through unprotected sex.

By 2002, the Gag Rule had cut off shipments of USAID-donated contraceptives to 16 developing countries, because the only recipients in those countries were IPPF (International Planned Parenthood Federation) members who refused to comply with the Gag Rule.

The leading family planning organizations in 13 other countries were also cut off.

## Limiting Access to HIV/AIDS Testing and Treatment

The loss of funding to groups that did not sign the Gag Rule has also caused many health cen-

ters and clinics to cut down their services, lay off staff, or close their doors altogether. Many of these groups are now so underfunded that they can no longer offer essential counseling, testing and treatment services to the public. The lack of these crucial and potentially life-saving services, combined with the deadly shortage of condoms, means that more people are likely to contract HIV and less likely to be able to manage their illness.

## Crippling HIV/AIDS Education and Prevention Efforts

The loss of HIV/AIDS education and prevention programs is particularly troubling since it increases the likelihood that people, especially adolescents, will engage in risky sexual behavior, increasing their chances of contracting HIV.

For example, the St. Lucia Planned Parenthood Association was forced to cancel plans to train 218 "peer helpers" from eight secondary schools and one primary school after losing USAID funding. This program would have reached 12,000 school-aged children with comprehensive reproductive health information, including HIV/AIDS prevention.

## For More Information

If you'd like to learn more about the Global Gag Rule, please visit:

<http://www.freechoicesaveslives.org/ippfwhr/learn.html>



Illustration courtesy of ISIS International Manila, Artist: Sandra Torrijos

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