



March 10, 2010

Ambassador-at-Large Melanne Verveer
Global Women's Issues
United States Department of State
Washington, DC

We, the undersigned representatives of women's, youth, and sexual and reproductive health and rights organizations would like to express our concerns on an important issue of mutual interest.

The 54th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women commemorates the 15 year review of the Beijing Platform for Action. A few days before the Conference ends, the Commission tabled a resolution on maternal mortality and morbidity. Member States must adopt a strong resolution that comprehensively reflects the needs of the 529,000 women dying annually due to pregnancy and childbirth-related causes and the over 15 million women suffering from complications, including severe morbidities and lifelong conditions.

Negotiations are currently underway for the resolution, tabled by the United States Government and other cosponsors, titled "Eliminating Maternal Mortality and Morbidity through the Empowerment of Women". Any international initiative that seeks to eliminate maternal mortality and morbidity through the empowerment of women, adolescents and girls must address the root causes of gender inequality, violence against women, comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services, and promotion and protection of their human rights, including their sexual and reproductive rights.

Fifteen years have passed since the Fourth World Conference on Women was convened in Beijing, attended by then First Lady and now Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who exclaimed that "Women's Rights are Human Rights and Human Rights are Women's Rights". Today, civil society representatives, including women, men and youth from the North and South, are disheartened and very concerned that the human rights of women, including the right to sexual and reproductive health, are being compromised.

All the progress made by the international community at Cairo and Beijing to ensure that women are able to fully realize their sexual and reproductive health and rights agreed to are in danger. Meeting universal access to reproductive health targets, protecting reproductive rights, ensuring access to family planning, preventing unsafe abortions, guaranteeing the human rights of women, and paying particular attention to adolescent girls who are most vulnerable from maternal mortality and morbidity during pregnancy and childbirth, are consciously being omitted from the resolution.

In 2008, United States citizens overwhelmingly voted for the now President, Barack Obama. This historic election reminded the world that the United States fully supports and promotes the

human rights of women and adolescent girls. One of President Obama's first executive actions in office, on January 23, 2009, was to repeal the Global Gag Rule, reinforcing United States commitment and worldwide support for addressing the reproductive health needs of women and adolescent girls. In May 2009, the Obama Administration launched a Global Health Initiative, which includes preventing 54 million unintended pregnancies and increasing modern contraceptive prevalence to 35% in assisted countries and reducing the number of first births to women under 18. President Obama's proposed 2011 budget for foreign assistance allocates \$715.7 million for bilateral and multilateral family planning and reproductive health assistance.

If the United States has proposed and tabled this resolution at the 54th session of the Commission on the Status of Women on eliminating maternal mortality and morbidity through the empowerment of women as a way to show its commitment to the rights of women and girls, then it must demonstrate and fight for the strongest possible language that builds upon important precedent on such issues, such as the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action in Cairo, the Beijing Platform for Action, and their five year reviews, the Millennium Development Goals 3 and 5, in particular target 5b, and the Human Rights Council Resolution adopted in June 2009 on preventable maternal mortality and morbidity and human rights.

As chair of this resolution, the United States of America must demonstrate its full commitment to promoting and protecting the human rights of women, adolescents and girls, including their sexual and reproductive rights, as per existing international agreements. If the resolution adopted at this CSW does not protect these, it will send the wrong message to the women and girls of the world, as well as contradict the Obama Administration's commitment to prioritize women in its Global Health Initiative.

We urge you to ensure that foreign policy being negotiated at the United Nations reflects the policies and priorities of the current United States administration. The decisions made at the 15th anniversary of Beijing will have a significant impact for women and girls around the world.

Sincerely,
Advocates for Youth
Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID)
Center for Reproductive Rights
Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE)
Equality Now
Ipas
International Planned Parenthood Federation/Western Hemisphere Region (IPPF/WHR)
Marie Stopes International-US
Population Action International
Women's International League for Peace & Freedom

CC: Ambassador Susan Rice, United States Permanent Representative to the United Nations
Mr. John Sammis, Deputy United States Representative to ECOSOC