

REIMPOSING THE GLOBAL GAG RULE THREATENS WOMEN'S HEALTH AND LIVES; UNDERMINES DEMOCRATIC VALUES

Section 412 of the Foreign Relations Authorization Act of 2012, scheduled for markup on July 20, reimposes the Mexico City Policy, or Global Gag Rule, on all U.S. foreign assistance funds. The Global Gag Rule is a failed Bush-era policy that would **gag overseas community groups and health experts, preventing them from discussing access to safe, legal abortion** – even when this needed counseling is funded with their own money kept separate from federal dollars. More than 46,000 women around the world die annually from unsafe abortions, and millions more suffer debilitating injuries and disabilities; imposing the Global Gag Rule anew would exacerbate this deplorable situation.

WHAT THE GLOBAL GAG RULE DOES:

The Global Gag Rule would prohibit foreign nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that receive any U.S. family planning assistance from promoting, performing, or counseling about abortions – even with their own, private funds. This prohibition – which does not save a single penny – is nearly identical to the failed policy imposed by previous anti-choice administrations.

THE GLOBAL GAG RULE THREATENS WOMEN'S LIVES AND HEALTH:

Under the Global Gag Rule, foreign NGOs would be:

- **Prohibited** from using their own funds to provide safe, legal abortions – even when a woman's physical or mental health is endangered;
- **Prohibited** from using their own funds to disseminate accurate medical counseling about abortion; and
- **Prohibited** from using their own funds to provide referrals for abortion to a non-U.S.-funded health clinic.

THE GLOBAL GAG RULE CONTRIBUTES TO THE GLOBAL CRISIS OF UNSAFE ABORTION:

The Global Gag Rule will not reduce the number of abortions. It will only increase the number of unsafe abortions.

- **Already, the level of harm from unsafe abortions is too high.** 21,000,000 unsafe abortions occur each year, nearly all in low-income countries. More than 95% of abortions in Africa and Latin America are performed under unsafe conditions, jeopardizing women's lives. In Kenya, for example, 30-40% of maternal deaths are due to unsafe abortion. The World Health Organization notes that "unsafe abortion is one of the most easily preventable and treatable causes of maternal mortality and morbidity."
- **By reducing access to family planning services, the Global Gag Rule would increase the number of abortions, most of which are unsafe.** Conversely, where family planning services are readily available, abortion rates are lower.

THE GLOBAL GAG RULE IS UNDEMOCRATIC AND UN-AMERICAN:

The Global Gag Rule violates important American values of freedom of speech and freedom to petition the government by prohibiting foreign groups from educating the public and advocating for legal reform. Under the Global Gag Rule, foreign community groups would be:

- **Prohibited** from petitioning their own governments to legalize safe abortion, to maintain current laws and oppose restrictions on safe abortion, or to decriminalize safe abortion;
- **Prohibited** from conducting public-education campaigns regarding safe abortion; and
- **Prohibited** from engaging in public-information initiatives and educational measures to ensure that abortions are safe and accessible to the full extent permitted by law.

Reinstating the Global Gag Rule will not result in a penny of savings – but it will exact a cost in lost lives and shattered health. We call upon House Foreign Affairs Committee members to attend the markup and speak out against this attempt to reinstate the Global Gag Rule.

For more information, please consult the Center for Reproductive Rights' report, *Breaking the Silence: The Global Gag Rule's Impact on Unsafe Abortion* (http://reproductiverights.org/sites/crr.civicactions.net/files/documents/bo_ggr.pdf). The report was written at the time President George W. Bush imposed a version of the Global Gag Rule, but its findings are as true today as they were then.