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USAID BANS CONTRACEPTIVE SUPPLIES TO LEADING FAMILY PLANNING ORGANISATION

Decision likely to result in more abortions and maternal deaths in Africa, says MSI

London – The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has instructed its staff to force governments in several African countries to discontinue the provision of US-funded contraceptive commodities to Marie Stopes International (MSI), one of the world’s leading family planning organisations.

The USAID instruction, issued by Assistant Administrator for Global Health Kent Hill, said the action was necessary because MSI works with the Chinese Government, whom the US State Department accuses of “coercive abortion and involuntary sterilisations”.

MSI chief executive Dana Hovig stated emphatically today that MSI does not support coercive abortion or involuntary sterilisation in China or elsewhere. “To the contrary, MSI is one of the few organisations that has worked over the past decade to increase the availability of voluntary, client-centred family planning services in China,” said Hovig. He blasted the USAID decision as “purely political and dangerous to the lives of women.”

Hovig said the USAID instruction will “seriously disrupt” MSI’s family planning programmes in at least six African countries – Ghana, Malawi, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe -- including one where the organisation delivers 25% of all family planning services nationally. Women in these countries will be left with few options other than abortion, the majority of which will be unsafe and will likely result in their death or disability.

“At a time when world governments have pledged to increase their commitment to improving the health of women, only the Bush Administration could find logic in the idea that they can somehow reduce abortion and promote choice for women in China by causing more abortion and gutting choice for women in Africa,” said Hovig. “This senseless decision is likely to have only one clear consequence: the death of African women and girls. And the Bush Administration should answer for that.”

Hovig explained that, according to formulas developed by the Guttmacher Institute, MSI’s family planning services prevented 5 to 7 million unwanted pregnancies in 2007 alone, thus preventing 1 to 1.5 million abortions. Most of these abortions would have been unsafe, putting women’s lives at risk. “Concretely

speaking, for every 2 intra-uterine devices (IUDs) the US government denies MSI, an unsafe abortion could result unless MSI is able to find alternative supplies,” Hovig explained.

In its instruction, USAID justifies its bullying of African governments under a little-known provision of US law called the Kemp-Kasten Amendment which prohibits US foreign aid to any organisation that, according to the President, "supports or participates in the management of a programme of coercive abortion or involuntary sterilisation." Republican Administrations dating back to President Reagan have used the law to deny funding to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) because of its work with the Chinese government.

The current Bush Administration reviewed UNFPA's activities in 2001, determined the agency was not in violation of Kemp-Kasten, and provided \$21.5 million to UNFPA. In July 2002, however, President Bush reversed his position and invoked Kemp-Kasten to justify canceling the \$34 million appropriated by Congress for UNFPA in fiscal year 2002, despite the fact that there had been no change in UNFPA's activities during this entire period. The Bush Administration has maintained its ban on UNFPA funding ever since.

“The Bush Administration's position over the years with respect to the UNFPA programme in China has been purely political, and their harmful politics are now being extended to MSI and the women we serve,” said Hovig. “USAID needs to decide what its purpose is: playing politics or saving lives.”

MSI has worked in China since 1998, in partnership with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the National Population and Family Planning Commission (NPFPC) and the Ministry of Health, to implement UNFPA's Country Programme. This programme aims to increase availability of quality, integrated, client-centred, and gender-sensitive reproductive health and family planning information and services, including those focusing on HIV/AIDS and client rights, for women, men, young people and migrants.

Globally, MSI manages sexual and reproductive health programmes in over 40 countries. In 2007 alone, MSI programmes protected the equivalent of 12.5 million couples from unwanted pregnancy, a 30% increase over the previous year and the single largest year-on-year growth in the organisation's 32 year history. A majority of MSI's family planning impact is in rural, underserved areas where women are particularly vulnerable and lives are most at risk from unwanted pregnancy and unsafe abortion.

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