

ALL PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP ON POPULATION, DEVELOPMENT AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH



February 2006
NEWSLETTER No 10

FUNDING

UK Government contributes an initial £3 million to unsafe abortion

The UK has made a two-year, £3 million contribution to a new Global Safe Abortion Programme.

Gareth Thomas MP, USS for ID said: *"We work very closely with the Americans, but we have a very different view from them on abortion, friends can disagree."*

It is hoped that other nations will add to the fund.

According to the World Health Organization, about 19 million women and girls have unsafe abortions each year. Nearly 70,000 die from infection or bleeding. One of the UN's Millennium Development Goals is to reduce maternal mortality, and unsafe abortions cause 13 percent of the 500,000 maternal deaths each year.

Britain Aids Women's Health in Cambodia

DfID will provide £1.7 million in technical and financial support to help the Cambodian Health Ministry implement the provisions of abortion law and strengthen the delivery of better methods of family planning. An additional £415,000 will give more poor women access to lifesaving maternal health services.

According to the British Ambassador to Cambodia, David Reader, up to a third of maternal deaths in Cambodia are caused by unsafe abortions.

UNFPA endorses \$27million to China programme

The UNFPA has approved \$27 million for a five-year programme in China to finance reproductive health activities and HIV/AIDS prevention. The funding will focus during 2006-2010 on 30 Chinese counties that have experimented with ways to improve services and give clients control over reproductive decisions.

In a statement, 10 European countries (Belgium, Britain, Denmark, Finland, France,

Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden Switzerland) which provide most of UNFPA's funding stressed that in their view "UNFPA's activities in China, as in the rest of the world, are in strict conformity with the unanimously adopted Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and play a key role in supporting our common endeavour, the promotion of all human rights and fundamental freedoms! "

G8 Gleneagles summit

G8 announced an extra US\$48 billion in aid a year made available by 2010.

The largest increase will come from the EU's shared pledge to reach a collective average of 0.56% of GNI for development assistance.

LEGISLATION/POLICY

China Amends Criminal Law for Gender Balance

An amendment to the China Criminal Law aiming at preventing baby gender selection was submitted to the National People's Congress in December 2005.

An Jian, deputy director of the Commission of Legislative Affairs of the NPC Standing Committee said: *"The artificial gender selection can jeopardize China's population structure and greatly incur social instability."*

The amendment says anyone who helps others or provides tools for baby selection is liable to three years in jail and a fine.

So far, 29 provincial congresses have enacted regulations barring baby gender selections of non-medical necessity.

Portugal authorises the use of the abortive pills in hospitals and clinics

The Health Ministry, following last year's recommendation by the WHO to include Mifepristone in the list of essential medicines and the WHO guidelines on the use of medical abortion, has authorised hospitals to import and use Mifepristone.

The abortion law has not been changed.

HUMAN RIGHTS

European Union Challenges Vatican's Draft Abortion Treaty with Slovakia

A legal panel appointed by the European commission has attacked a draft treaty between Slovakia and the Vatican that would restrict sensitive medical treatment such as abortions and in-vitro fertilization.

The lawyers warned that the treaty could place Slovakia in breach of its obligations as a member of the EU. The treaty would allow healthcare workers in hospitals founded by the Catholic Church to refuse to perform abortions or carry out fertility treatment on "conscience" grounds.

The EU group agreed that "certain religious organizations" should have the right not to perform "certain activities where this would conflict with [their] ethos or belief." But it added: "It is important the exercise of this right does not conflict with the rights of others, including the right of all women to receive certain medical services or counselling without any discrimination."

The Vatican has signed agreements with Italy, Latvia and Portugal on "religious conscientious objection," but these have been more limited.

SRHR PROGRAMME WORK

Colombian councilman proposes all men and women must carry a condom

Roman Catholic priests in a Colombian town are furious over a councilman's proposal that people 14 and older must carry a condom at all times to reduce unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases.

William Pena, a councilman in Tulua, said he will present a formal proposal requiring all men and women, even those just on a visit to the town to carry at least one condom. Those caught empty-pocketed could be fined \$180 or ordered to take a safe sex course.

He said. "Tulua has one of the highest rates of HIV infection in Colombia, sexual relations are going on constantly, if you carry a condom, chances are you'll use it during the day."

The proposal could be in effect by March.

Universal HIV/AIDS treatment steering committee

A Global Steering Committee, co-chaired by UNAIDS and the UK government, has been established to initiate the process, explore global-level solutions to common obstacles,

and compile country and regional inputs into a global framework for consideration by the 2006 UN General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS.

The ultimate aim is to come up with action plans and clear commitments to address obstacles to universal access to HIV/AIDS treatment at the country, regional and global levels.

Twin births boom in China as more women take fertility drugs

The number of twin births is rising rapidly across China as more women take fertility drugs, often in order to circumvent the nation's population policies.

At the Maternal and Child Hygiene Hospital in east China's Nanjing city, 90 sets of twins and triplets were born last year, compared with usually just 20 sets annually.

The trend, which has also been observed in other major Chinese cities, is boosted by well-off urban couples who wish to get around the government's one-child policy.

Medical experts in China warned there could be major negative consequences for society and for the individual mothers if the drugs are not taken correctly.

Good Catholics use Condoms

In February 2006, giant ads and posters proclaiming: "*We believe in God. We believe sex is sacred. We believe in protecting each other. We believe in using condoms*", will appear in bus shelters, subways, hospitals, clinics and service agencies throughout New York, San Francisco and Washington DC.

UK SRHR

UK Sex and Relationship Education

All teachers of sex and relationship education are encouraged to undertake the Government funded teachers' certificate in personal social and health education.

Almost 5,000 teachers have undertaken the certificate since 2002.

Pupils withdrawn from Sex and Relationship Education

The UK Government does not collect data centrally on the numbers of parents withdrawing pupils from the non-statutory elements of sex education. Ofsted estimates 0.04 per cent of parents exercise this right.

Age of first sex in the UK

A survey of 1,790 people aged between 16

and 64, found that the average age of first sex has gone up from just over 17 to nearly age 18, and that the number of young people who have sex at age 14 and 15 has dropped from 23 per cent in 2002 to 15 per cent in 2006.

Sexual Health in the UK

During 2006-2007, inequality and sexual health will become key priorities for the NHS for the first time, as set out in the NHS operating framework.

48% of patients are accessing GUM services within 48 hrs, and in some areas the percentage is higher.

Gonorrhoea rates are decreasing.

The rollout National Chlamydia Screening Programmes is well advanced, targeting under 25-years-olds. By 2007 the screening will cover the whole of England, in line with the commitment in the Choosing Health White Paper.

Since November 2005 young men and women have been able to access Chlamydia test kits through Boots stores across London.

The new Sexual Health advertising campaign will be launched later in 2006.

UK Government backed pilot project on medical abortion at home

Women who are less than nine weeks pregnant can safely have medical abortions at home, according to the head of a government-backed UK pilot project.

Abortion services for the 20,000 women who seek a chemically induced abortion every year could be transformed should the Department of Health's official evaluation of the pilot confirm initial findings.

Shirley Butler, the project manager of one pilot which has tested the abortions with 172 women patients since 2004 said:

"We haven't had any significant problems apart from one woman who had a slightly heavy bleed. In my opinion medical abortions outside of acute hospitals seem to be safe." She added that women who took part in the trial were positive about it.

For references and more information contact: Parliamentary and Policy Advisor Ann Mette Kjaerby, APPG Population, Development and Reproductive Health.

E-mail: kjaerbym@parliament.uk or Telephone: 0207 219 2492 ☺