



ALL PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP ON POPULATION, DEVELOPMENT AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

May 2007
NEWSLETTER

APPG News and Events

APPG Report

On 31 January 2007 the APPG launched its report, *Return of the Population Growth Factor: Its Impact Upon the Millennium Development Goals*. The report summarises testimony and findings from the APPG's parliamentary hearings in 2006. It affirms that current levels of population growth in the least developed countries and regions make the Millennium Development Goals difficult or impossible to achieve.

International Women's Day

To commemorate International Women's Day, on 8 March 2007 the APPG hosted the premiere of Population Action International's (PAI) documentary short film, *Abstaining from Reality: U.S. Restrictions on HIV Prevention*. The 9-minute film documents the impact of U.S. family planning policies in Kenya and Uganda. At the event on 8 March 2007, two women featured in the film were present to answer questions.

To obtain a copy of the APPG report or the PAI film, please contact Kari Mawhood on extension 2641, or via email at: mawhoodk@parliament.uk

Reproductive Health and the Law

U.S.

On 18 April 2007 the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act despite rulings from lower courts that it was unconstitutional in part because there was no exception for the health of the mother. The following is an extract of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg's strongly worded dissent:

"The Court further pretends that its decision protects women. . . the Court shields women by denying them any choice in the matter. This way of protecting women recalls ancient notions about women's place in society and under the Constitution — ideas that have long since been discredited. In candor, the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act, and the Court's defense of it, cannot be understood as anything other than an effort to chip away at a right declared again and again by this Court — and with increasing comprehension

of its centrality to women's lives. A decision of the character the Court makes today should not have staying power."

Mexico

On 24 April 2007 Mexico City's parliament voted to legalise abortion. The legislation, instructs local health services to provide abortions during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy, no questions asked, and does not restrict who can offer the service, opening the door for specialised private clinics. In the rest of Mexico, abortion remains illegal except in the case of rape, incest, or when the mother's life is threatened, and even then can be difficult to obtain.

Brazil

Recently, the President of Brazil, Luiz Inacio Lula Da Silva, said that while he was personally opposed to abortion, he thought it should be considered a public health issue, not a moral one. The Health Minister of Brazil, Dr. Jose Gomes Temporao also called for referendum in March on Brazil's abortion laws. Currently abortion is illegal in Brazil except in very limited circumstances, and women convicted of having illegal abortions can be sentenced to up to three years in prison.

Pope Benedict XVI created controversy during his May 2007 visit to Brazil, when he insisted the Catholic church demanded respect for life "from the moment of conception". Also, when asked by a reporter en route to Brazil whether the legislators in Mexico City who voted in favour of legalising abortion should be considered excommunicated, he answered yes. After the Pope's comments Dr. Temporao cancelled a planned meeting with him, saying "You cannot prescribe dogmas and precepts from one particular religion for the whole of society. In Brazil, the state and the church have been separate for centuries."

Ireland

On 9 May 2007 the Irish high court ruled that a 17-year-old woman can leave the country to obtain an abortion. "Miss D", as the woman is known, was 18 weeks pregnant with a foetus with a severe brain defect.

Portugal

On 11 April 2007 Anibal Cavasco Silva, president of Portugal, ratified a new law to legalise abortion up until the 10th week of pregnancy, a result of a referendum that overwhelmingly favored the legalisation of abortion. Previously, Portugal had one of the most restrictive abortion laws in Europe, and it is hoped that the new law will prevent dangerous illicit abortions.

Poland

In March, the European Court on Human Rights (ECHR) made a landmark judgment in ruling in favour of Alicja Tysiac. Tysiac, who has severe myopia, was told by eye specialists if she carried her pregnancy to term, she could be left blind. She sought an abortion, but was denied approval until she had passed the 12-week limit for the procedure. Forced to carry her pregnancy to term, she is now registered as disabled due to her vision loss. She made a complaint to the ECHR that Poland had violated her right to a private life, and the court ruled in her favour, awarding her 25,000 Euros. Poland continues to have highly restrictive abortion laws, and Tysiac has endured numerous protests surrounding her decision to mount a legal challenge to defend her rights.

Turkey

According to the *Los Angeles Times*, Turkey has launched a multi-tiered campaign against 'honour' killings. It includes more serious jail sentences for convicted felons, telephone hotlines, town hall meetings and commercials featuring Turkish Imams and celebrities to raise awareness.

International Reproductive Health and Development Funding

EP Resolution on a Financing Instrument for Development Cooperation

The European Parliament's has approved a financing instrument for development co-operation for 2007-2013. MEPs are insisting this instrument must focus on developing countries, in line with Millennium Development Goals. A 20% benchmark for health and education was also accepted for the first time.

Follow-up to the International Conference on Financing for Development

The United Nations General Assembly has agreed to hold a Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development to Review the Implementation of the Monterrey Consensus in Doha, Qatar in the second half of 2008. The preparatory process will commence in 2007 and the UN member states pledged to involve all relevant stakeholders, including civil society.

Family Planning Resources Dwindle

According to UNFPA, the percentage of funding allocated to family planning in all population assistance has dropped from 55% in 1995 to 9% in 2004. Although funding for population assistance is on the rise, it has not kept pace with increased needs. With the scale of the HIV/AIDS pandemic health care costs have spiralled higher than previously anticipated.

Thoraya Ahmed Obaid, Executive Director of UNFPA said, "The victims of this funding gap have been poor women in poor countries who cannot exercise their reproductive rights and plan their families. It is a serious problem that needs to be urgently addressed."

PEPFAR

The US-Office of the Global AIDS Coordinator released its 3rd Annual Report to Congress on the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR).

Policy Developments

World Bank's family planning policy attacked

When in April 2007, Juan José Daboub, the World Bank's managing director, ordered staff to remove all references to family planning from its country assistance programme document for Madagascar, civil society groups and European governments campaigned to keep strong reproductive health language in the documents. In the end, the deleted references to family planning were restored due to these concerted efforts.

Draft 18-month Programme of the German, Portuguese and Slovenian Presidencies

In the area of development policy, the three Presidencies will concentrate on implementing the European Consensus on Development as well as the EU's Monterrey commitments, including its commitments to increase its Official Development Aid (ODA). The three Presidencies will address issues of global relevance to development, such as poverty related and sexually transmittable diseases. The Presidencies will therefore strongly focus on implementing the EU's Strategy for Africa and will actively support framing and implementing an EU-Africa Joint Strategy. In implementing the EU strategy for Africa, particular attention will be given to gender equality in all partnerships and in national development strategies.

Barcelona Declaration

On 27 February- 3 March 2007, Ministry of Health officials from eight African countries, along with UNFPA representatives, NGOs and researchers met in Barcelona for the "High Level Meeting on Sexual and Reproductive Health Policies in Africa". At the meeting, the participants adopted the Barcelona Declaration, "Making Sexual and Reproductive Health a Reality in Africa", which, among other things, reaffirmed the commitment of Spanish and Catalan cooperation agencies to promoting reproductive health and rights in Africa.

2007 – European Year of Equal Opportunities for All

The European Year of Equal Opportunities for All in 2007 will seek to make people in the EU more aware of their rights to enjoy equal treatment and a life free of discrimination. The activities undertaken during the Year will focus on the discrimination some individuals suffer owing to their race or ethnic origin, religion or belief, age, gender, sexual orientation or disability, all of which are grounds for discrimination that may be addressed at European level.

UNICEF State of the World's Children 2007

This report examines the status of women around the world. It concludes that an end to gender discrimination produces the 'double dividend' of benefiting women and children – which, in turn, has a positive impact on the health and development of societies everywhere. The State of the World's Children 2007 shows that in the long run, empowering women will enhance efforts to reach all of the other Millennium Development Goals by 2015.

UK Parliament

On 16 April 2007, questions were raised in the House of Lords on how the government assesses the success of policies to prevent HIV/AIDS. On 18 April 2007 Baroness Tonge asked for a response to reports that the World Bank's managing director had ordered all family planning references to be deleted from Madagascar's country assistance program.

During a short debate on 20 April 2007 in the House of Lords, Baroness Tonge also asked the government what steps they are taking to increase provision of contraceptive services and increase training in the field of sexual health generally. These examples serve to highlight the continued concern of Parliamentarians on issues of reproductive and sexual health, both nationally and internationally.

Recent Appointments

World Health Organisation

Bird flu expert Margaret Chan took over as head of the WHO in January 2007. She has said her focus will be on health threats to women, and populations in Africa.

Global Fund

In April, the Board of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria elected Rajat Gupta, former managing director of McKinsey and Company as their new Chair. They also elected Elizabeth Mataka, head of a Zambian AIDS organisation, as the Vice-Chair.

Catholics For a Free Choice (CFFC)

Jon O'Brien, former Program Manager at IPPF's European Bureau and Vice President of Catholics for a Free Choice, has replaced Frances Kissling as President of Catholics For a Free Choice.

Sexual and Reproductive Health News

Morning-After Pill Gaining Support

On 8 January 2007, *Reuters* reported that despite widespread influence of the Catholic Church in Latin America, many governments are attempting to pass legislation to provide the morning-after pill free without a prescription. Brazil and Argentina are aiming to join the 40 countries worldwide where the pill is legal. "This is part of an historic process in our region, a process of evolution in which reproductive rights are increasingly seen as people's rights," said Dr. Margarita Berkenwald, coordinator of Buenos Aires' program for sexual and reproductive health.

HIV sperm washing – a way of conceiving safely

Increasing numbers of HIV infected men and women in the UK are asking the medical profession to help them have children safely. Sperm washing can be an effective risk reduction treatment for all HIV discordant couples trying to conceive where the male partner is infected and the female partner is negative.

Sperm washing is, however, regarded as a 'risk reduction' as opposed to 'risk-free' method as HIV could still be present in the washed sample but be below the detection limit of the HIV test used. To date, 5,000 treatment cycles using correctly washed sperm have been carried out in specialised centres in Europe and America. This has led to over 500 healthy children being born with no reports of HIV infection in either the woman or her child. There has been one case reported in the world literature of a woman becoming infected through the insemination of washed sperm. In this case the sperm was not correctly processed and

certainly not tested for HIV before being used.

Sexual and Reproductive Health in China

On 13 May 2007, *The New York Times* reported that abortion is on the rise among young, single women in China. The article attributes this to a focus by the government on the reproductive lives of married women and a reluctance to educate girls and young women about sexual health and contraception. At the same time, premarital sex is also increasing in China, along with higher rates of HIV/AIDS transmission.

According to Xu Jin, the director of a Marie Stopes International clinic in the eastern city of Qingdao, "There is a blind spot in sex education in China. We are here to fill the hole in the system." The Marie Stopes clinic in Qingdao opened in 2003, and was the first non-government clinic of its kind in China. Since then, Marie Stopes has opened a clinic in Nanjing and is planning to open several others. Ms. Xu said a major objective of their clinic was to provide reliable information about contraception and sex education to young women.

HPV Vaccine

Recent news reports have detailed the controversy in the U.S. over the administration of the HPV vaccine, Gardasil, manufactured by Merck. The vaccine protects girls and women against four of the dozens of strains of human papilloma virus, or HPV, two of which are responsible for 70 percent of cervical cancer cases. Some states in the U.S. are planning to require the vaccine for students entering the sixth grade (age 11), but there is now a backlash threatening to derail these efforts.

Critics argue that the extensive involvement of Merck in lobbying for the compulsory use of the vaccine is inappropriate. Others are concerned that some states' plans to allow parents to opt out of the HPV vaccine could create a 'culture of vaccine refusal'. An additional concern is the high cost of the vaccine, currently USD 360.00 for a full three-dose regimen. Currently, most US insurance companies will not cover the cost. Still other conservative critics claim that the vaccine would result in sexual promiscuity if administered to young girls. State and local governments will continue to develop different plans to address these challenges.

UK SRHR

The NSPCC has called on the government to ensure that 14 to 16-year-olds are taught about sex in the context of relationships, peer pressure and the law. The charity Womankind Worldwide is piloting an education programme - Challenging Violence, Changing Lives - to raise

awareness of male violence against women and includes a component on pornography and prostitution for Year 11 pupils.

Liz Martin, the creative director, said 'What teachers are saying is that younger girls are vulnerable to approaches from older, sophisticated men from outside school. Porn is used in chatroom grooming. Yet girls are also visiting porn sites to find out what they need to please boys. They are not questioning abusive relationships'. (Guardian Education, 30 Jan 2007, pp1-2)

Forthcoming Events

On the **30-31 May 2007** in Berlin, the European Parliamentary Forum (EPF) on Population and Development will hold a conference on The Economic Rewards of Investing in HIV/AIDS Prevention and Health with Parliamentarians from G8, European and African countries.

From the **18-20 October 2007** in London, the *Women Deliver* conference will bring together the health and development communities to address a common goal of improved women's health, safe pregnancy and childbirth. The conference's theme is 'Invest in Women- It Pays'.

New Publication

On 14 February 2007, a new magazine for the LGBT community in Arab countries was launched. Submissions are accepted from throughout the world in Arabic, English, French, and German. It is available online at:

<http://www.mithly.com/main/mainpage.htm>

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