

ALL PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP ON POPULATION DEVELOPMENT AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH



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FUNDING

US \$15 billion Aid to HIV/AIDS

The US has passed legislation that will see the US spend \$15 billion over 5 years on global anti-HIV/AIDS efforts.

Lawmakers agreed not to prohibit US funding for HIV/AIDS programmes run by international family planning groups that also provide abortion services, but the new US money will not be available for family planning!

The bill backs an "ABC" approach -- abstinence, be faithful, and use condoms -- to fighting the spread of HIV and will allow funds to go to religious-affiliated groups that object to condom use for religious or moral reasons. Critics have said the latter provision will hurt educational programmes on safe sex options.

WHO states: "Existing reproductive-health programmes provide a clear entry point for the delivery of HIV/AIDS interventions."



Japan Aid to Iraqi women & children

Japan has announced it will donate up to \$100 million to international organisations for humanitarian assistance for the Iraqi people. Specifically aid will go to children and women.

- 1/5 Iraqi women are of childbearing age;
- 1 Iraqi woman bears on average 5 children;

- 20 000 Iraqi women will need immediate help with high-risk pregnancies that require emergency care such as caesarean sections;
- stress of conflict increases the risk of miscarriage and the subsequent potential of infections;
- maternal mortality rate in Iraq is 370/100 000 live births;
- 1/10 babies in Iraq will not survive beyond 5 years;

Bill Gates \$60 million Microbicides Aid

Bill Gates has made \$60 million available to fund research into how to reduce the risk of HIV infection among women in developing countries. The grant will be used to formulate an anti-HIV gel, cream or similar product - microbicides.

- women are at greater risk of HIV infection than men;
- female condoms are rarely used due to cost and acceptability;
- microbicides might be available by 2010.

EU €22 million Aid to UNFPA

The EU and the UNFPA signed an agreement for a €22.24 million 3 year reproductive health initiative for youth in Asia, which will be implemented in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Viet Nam.

The EU will provide €18.5 million. The remainder is to be covered by executing NGOs.

Swedish Aid to UNFPA

Sweden has increased aid to UNFPA by \$24.4 million this year, up \$2.4 million from \$22 million it provided last year.

34 Million Friends of UNFPA Campaign has raised \$1 000 000

HUMAN RIGHTS

International Women's day

Hundreds of thousands of women all over the globe turned out to remind the world that they are still far from equal citizens on 8th March.

African Women and Sexual Rights

"If you want to save Africa, you must save the African woman first."- UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

The African Women's Sexual and Reproductive Rights Conference was held in S. Africa in February. The conference was an important step in developing a coordinated agenda to promote sexual rights in Africa.

Sexual rights for women were first recognised on the international agenda at the UN World Conference on Women in Beijing 1995.

Sexual rights, if respected, would provide women and girls with protection from many of the widespread abuses that they face today such as:

- unwanted sexual relations;
- unwanted or coerced pregnancy;
- sexual harassment and intimidation;
- sexual exploitation;
- rape;
- coercive or unsafe contraceptives;
- coercive or unsafe abortions;
- domestic violence;
- female genital mutilation;
- discrimination based on sexual orientation and STIs.

Rape in South Africa is prevalent

South Africa is widely believed to have one of the highest incidences of rape in the world. 50 000 rapes were reported in 2001 alone.

Women's group estimate that a woman is raped every 26 seconds and a child every 15 minutes. Possible causes:

- The belief that sex with a virgin is a cure for AIDS;
- The lack of power of women;
- Poverty.

The Government recognising the ineffective justice system in dealing with rape, has set up 29 newly dedicated rape courts with trained prosecutors and judges.

People are saying: "If we can bring down apartheid, we can bring down violence against women."

POLICIES

EU statement at the UN Commission on Population and Development

The EU reaffirmed its commitment to the full implementation of the ICPD PoA at the 36th

session of the Commission on Population and Development in March.

EU stated that a firm commitment to population, reproductive health and gender issues is a prerequisite if the goals and targets of the ICPD PoA and the programme of the Millennium Summit are to be met.

The Vatican and its UN status

The Vatican's latest onslaught comes in a 1 000 page document dealing with Sexuality, in which it repeats its opposition to the use of condoms in combating HIV infection.

At present the Holy See - which is, in effect, the Vatican's Government - has Non-Member State Permanent Observer status, which permits it to speak at and vote at UN Conferences. No other religion has such a privileged position at the UN. It uses this position to try to enforce Catholic doctrine in UN policy.

People are calling on Kofi Annan to strip the Vatican of its status. A popular Italian gay television presenter is noted to say: "The Vatican is burning up years of work of health professionals in a matter of seconds," referring to the Vatican's message to the world's one billion Catholics on condoms.

He added: "The irony of this vicious message against homosexuality is that there are more gays per capita inside the Vatican than in most other countries."

Poland and Abortion Law

Poland has one of the most restrictive Abortion Laws in Europe. Legislation adopted in 1993 allows for abortion only in 3 cases:

- When the mother's life is in danger;
- When the foetus has an incurable disease;
- When a pregnancy is a result of rape.

Despite this very limited number of cases when abortion may be allowed, the Act is even stricter in practice than on paper. Doctors refuse to conduct the procedure, even if the woman fulfils the criteria specified in the legislation, evoking the clause of "conscientious objection", and, as reality shows, rather in fear of loosing their jobs rather than true objection (because they do not have the same objections in their private clinics where they charge huge money for conducting the procedure).

The most underprivileged - women from the poorest backgrounds, the sick or raped girls suffer the most. The richer women go abroad and legally undergo abortion.

Poland has an estimated 80 - 200 000 abortions per year. In 2001, only 124 abortions were performed legally.

Poland is one of 10 countries seeking to become part of the EU in May 2004.

Should Poland join, it would be only the second country in the EU where abortion is highly restricted.

A poll showed that 49 % of Poles wanted the abortion law relaxed and only 37% were against it. 90% of the country's citizens consider themselves Catholic.

Russia is cracking down on human trafficking

The Duma drafted a law that will make trafficking in humans illegal in Russia. Given Russia's crime-ridden society, it will not solve the problem. But without it, criminal gangs will be free to earn an estimated \$7 billion a year trafficking in unwilling prostitutes.

China Sex-Selection Abortions banned to end Population imbalance

The China central government has introduced laws banning sex-selective abortions.

China currently has more than 117 males born for every 100 females.

Boys have been traditionally favoured in Chinese families, partly because:

- they are seen as the ones who carry on the family name;
- they are believed to have a greater earning potential and will be able to provide an economic safety net;
- when women get married they will give priority to looking after their husband's parents.

Worldwide, the ratio is between 105 and 107 males to 100 females.

Compulsory HIV Testing in South Africa

Compulsory Testing of Alleged Sexual and Offenders Bill, 2003, has been introduced in South Africa. The purpose of the Bill is to provide a speedy and uncomplicated mechanism whereby the victim of a sexual offence can apply to have the alleged offender tested for HIV and to have information regarding the test results disclosed to the victim.

The World Water Development Report, "Water for People, Water for Life," states:

The world will face a water crisis a few decades from now as population growth,

pollution and climate change deprive billions of the most precious natural resource of all.

No region will be spared from the impact of this crisis.

- In 2050, between two billion people in 48 countries and up to seven billion people in 60 countries will be faced with scarcity of fresh water.
- Every day, about two million tonnes of waste are dumped into rivers, lakes and streams.
- Mankind's reckless burning of fossil fuels, will badly hit fresh water supplies.

Birth rates are slowing down, but the world's population will still reach about 9.3 billion by 2050, as compared to 6.1 billion in 2001.

The report's recommendations include mustering the "political will" to make leaders aware of the impending crisis and to honour the commitments made by their governments.

COMPREHENSIVE SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH CARE SERVICES

ICPD+10

The International Planned Parenthood Federation, Family Care International and Population Action International, propose to lead an effort with other civil society organisations and international leadership to revitalise the Cairo agenda in the run up to the ICPD+10. Activities will include:

- Producing a global "report card" based on analysis of progress towards ICPD goals.
- Collaborating with leading NGOs to convene an international roundtable possibly in Kenya.
- Launching a communications campaign aimed at refocusing attention on the importance of the goals of the ICPD.

HIV mode of transmission - Dirty Needles Research Rejected

UN agencies responsible for combating AIDS rejected evidence in a British Medical Journal that poor medical hygiene practices such as unsafe injections are responsible for most HIV infections in Africa.

Unsafe sex is the primary mode of transmission of HIV in Africa!

UK HIV/AIDS facts 2002:

- 41 200 people living with HIV/AIDS - 1/3 do not know their status;
- 12 504 cumulative deaths from HIV/AIDS;
- 2945 diagnosed with HIV/AIDS in 2002;
- 84% cumulative diagnoses from sexual exposure to HIV (30% heterosexual, 54% homosexual);
- 7% cumulative diagnoses from injecting drug use;
- 3% from blood tissue/blood transfusions;
- 2% cumulative diagnoses from MTCT;
- 4% cumulative diagnoses undetermined/other.

Russia and abortion

About 5 million -- or 13 percent -- of Russian married couples are infertile. In nearly three out of four cases, infertility is attributed to the woman, typically because of complications from one or more abortions.

With no access to decent contraceptives, Russian women have come to view abortion as a routine procedure. A study in 1994 found that the average Russian woman had three abortions by the end of her child-bearing years.

Interesting Points

DFID's restructuring

The Population/Reproductive Health unit within DFID no longer exist after restructuring within DFID on 1st April 2003.

The majority of Population/Reproductive Health issues will be taken over by the HIV/AIDS, Service Delivery and Rapid Response team headed by Deputy Director, Michael Schultz.

An 'Anti Choice' person will head the US Reproductive Health Drugs Advisory Committee

President Bush has announced his plan to select Dr. W. David Hager to head up the Reproductive Health Drugs Advisory Committee. Dr. Hager is a practicing Obstetrician/Gynaecologist who describes himself as "pro-life" and refuses to prescribe contraceptives to unmarried women.

In the book Dr. Hager wrote with his wife, entitled "Stress and the Woman's Body," he suggests that women who suffer from premenstrual syndrome should seek help from reading the bible and praying!

Rwanda All Party Parliamentary Group

The Rwandan Parliamentarians established an All Party Parliamentary Group on Population and Development in January!

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