

# CATHOLICS FOR CHOICE

IN GOOD CONSCIENCE

5 April 2010

Office of the Prime Minister  
80 Wellington Street  
Ottawa  
K1A 0A2

Dear Prime Minister Harper,

We, as Catholics, are disappointed in the Canadian government's motion to exclude family planning from the G8 initiative on maternal and child health. We urge you to reconsider this position and remedy it at the earliest possible opportunity.

Historically, Canada has played a leading role in the campaign to improve the reproductive health of women around the world. From having very good laws and services domestically, successive Canadian administrations have supported worldwide efforts to provide adequate funding of international family planning, HIV-prevention and reproductive health programs. We would like to see this example continue and expand in the future.

Each year, about 200 million women lack access to family planning and contraceptive information and services. Forty million of those women will become pregnant and have an abortion; 50 percent of those abortions will take place in unsafe conditions. Every year, 500,000 women and girls die from complications associated with pregnancy and childbirth. Ninety-nine percent of those deaths occur in developing countries. As a result of complications from unsafe abortion, at least 5 million women are seriously injured and 70,000 women die. UNFPA estimates that the unmet need for contraception is responsible for one in three deaths related to pregnancy and childbirth around the world and that some 178,000 maternal deaths and an untold number of maternal injuries could be prevented if all women had access to family planning. The lack of maternal and child care contributes to numerous other health problems including increased rates of HIV infection, incontinence and fistula.

Catholics around the world support access to family planning as a matter of personal choice as well as an issue of public health and social justice. A US study showed found that 97 percent of sexually active Catholic women have used a form of contraception banned by the church hierarchy. And a poll by Catholics for Choice found that Catholics around the world support condom use as prolife because it helps prevent the spread of HIV and AIDS, including 90 percent of Catholics in Mexico, 86 percent of Catholics in Ireland, 79 percent of Catholics in the United States and 77 percent of Catholics in the Philippines.

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Bishops around the world have reaffirmed the right of Catholics to follow their consciences on the birth control decision. In the wake of the Vatican's 1968 declaration on the impermissibility of contraceptive use, Canadian bishops released a statement saying that Catholics who tried "sincerely but without success" to follow the teaching "may be safely assured that whoever honestly chooses the course which seems right to him does so in good conscience." Bishops' conferences in Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, France and Holland issued similar statements. Time and again, the evidence shows that millions of good Catholics around the world do follow their consciences in choosing contraception, and they want access to services that allow them to determine the number and spacing of their children.

Maternal mortality can be alleviated through wider access to comprehensive reproductive healthcare services. It is a basic human right and a matter of social justice to provide women and men access to family planning and abortion services and information to prevent unplanned and high-risk pregnancies. We urge the Canadian government to return to its leading role in advocating for family planning, including in the G8 agreement on maternal health. In so doing, the government will have the support of Catholics domestically and internationally in your efforts to help reduce maternal mortality.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jon O'Brien". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "J".

Jon O'Brien  
President  
Catholics for Choice

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rosemary Ganley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "R".

Rosemary Ganley  
Coordinator  
Catholics for Choice Canada