

March 30, 2015

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama,

We, the undersigned **31** national faith-based organizations and those representing diverse communities of faith, are morally compelled to urge your immediate action to end the harmful and excessively restrictive implementation of the Helms Amendment by issuing guidance to instruct USAID and the State Department to allow abortion services in the cases of rape, incest and life endangerment. Such action is morally and ethically required, and it is both long-overdue and essential to safeguard the lives and health of women in developing countries served by US foreign assistance.

Our faith traditions compel us to speak out for social justice and the right of all people to follow their own conscience in making decisions concerning their reproductive health. As people of faith, we are committed to serve and support the marginalized members of our society, especially those with limited financial means. The administration's current implementation of Helms all but eliminates access to safe and legal abortion for many and leads to preventable deaths and injuries among the world's most vulnerable women. This is a violation of their fundamental human rights. We believe our country's foreign aid should serve to help women—not interfere with their ability to make their own conscience-based decisions. Above all, it must not endanger their lives. That is why we cannot in good conscience stand idly by as the needs of women around the world are ignored by continuing the unnecessarily restrictive implementation of US foreign assistance policy.

We urge your administration to heed the voice of the majority of people of faith who are called to advocate for sexual and reproductive freedom for ourselves and our neighbors—both at home and abroad. We urge you to do so, rather than heed the call of those who seek to impose their religious beliefs on others and secure special rules that erode individuals' religious liberty and our democratic ideals.

Religious voices are a vital part of public discourse, but religious views should never be enshrined in public policy. Furthermore, making concessions to religiously-affiliated organizations that seek only to secure special rules to protect their business interests is irresponsible at best, and is at worst a distortion of true religious liberty. We believe that when a religiously-affiliated agency takes taxpayer money to serve those in need, it should be expected to play by the same rules as other federal grantees. It is wrong that these entities are granted exemptions that sacrifice the rights of those they would claim to serve, and which deny women and men the healthcare and social services they need.

As communities of faith, we stand with each woman and her right to make her own decisions about her pregnancy in accordance with her own religious and moral beliefs, regardless of where she lives, what her circumstance or from whom she receives care. As such, we urge you to change your administration's unduly harsh implementation of Helms to a policy without special exemptions for those entities that would cite religious beliefs as the basis to deny women abortion care in legally permitted circumstances. Any proposal that would allow exemptions for groups asserting religious beliefs to deny abortion access creates a dangerous precedent, erodes the separation of religion and state and endangers women's lives. As people of faith, we believe this is wrong.

Your administration's continued inaction on this issue frustrates and distresses us. We believe our government should foster and protect women's reproductive health, rights and justice, and not allow women's lives to be used as a political bargaining chip to appease extremist views. It is within your power to enact a policy that supports what the majority of people of faith believe—that federal dollars should be used for the common good and allow each individual to exercise their own conscience in making healthcare decisions, instead of allowing one religious belief to be imposed on everyone.

As a diverse community of faith, we call upon you to finally bring an end to this harmful misinterpretation of the law. We implore the administration to take immediate action to protect the health and religious liberty of women around the world by removing unnecessary obstacles to abortion care.

We urge you to issue guidance to USAID and the State Department to allow abortion services in the cases of rape, incest and life endangerment with US foreign assistance funding; to allow aid workers to discuss all pregnancy options with the women they serve; and to allow medical clinics to purchase equipment that can save women's lives in the event of a miscarriage. Vulnerable women and girls in some of the poorest parts of the world deserve no less. It is the right thing to do, and we believe the time to act is now.

With hope and faith,

A Critical Mass: Women Celebrating Eucharist	Methodist Federation for Social Action
Catholics for Choice	Metropolitan Community Churches (MCC)
Chicago Women-Church	Muslims for Progressive Values
Clergy Advocacy Board	National Coalition of American Nuns (NCAN)
of Planned Parenthood Federation of America	National Council of Jewish Women
Concerned Clergy for Choice	Presbyterians Affirming Reproductive Options
CORPUS	Presbyterian Voices for Justice
Disciples for Choice	Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice
Disciples Justice Action Network	Religious Institute, Inc
Episcopal Women's Caucus	Society for Humanistic Judaism
Global Justice Institute	Unitarian Universalist Association
Hadassah, The Women's Zionist Organization of America, Inc.	Unitarian Universalist Women's Federation
Hindu American Foundation	United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries
Jewish Women International	Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual (WATER)
Keshet	Women's League for Conservative Judaism
Loretto Women's Network	Women's Ordination Conference

cc: Ms. Valarie Jarrett
Chair, White House Council on Women and Girls and Senior Advisor to the President

Ms. Melissa Rogers
Special Assistant to the President and Executive Director of the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships

Ms. Gayle Smith
Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director, National Security Council

Ms. Tina Tchen
Assistant to the President and Chief of Staff to the First Lady
Executive Director, White House Council on Women and Girls