

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

August 13, 2020

The Honorable John Barsa
Acting Administrator
U.S. Agency for International Development
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20523

Dear Acting Administrator Barsa,

Thank you for your letter to the United Nations (UN) Secretary General on May 18, 2020 opposing the egregious imposition of abortion and abortion-inducing drugs under the guise of “sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services” and its derivatives in the UN’s COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan (Global HRP). We agree with you that the “UN should not use this crisis as an opportunity to advance access to abortion as an ‘essential service.’”¹ Your insistence that UN agreements and activities should be neutral on abortion is crucial to enforcing the Siljander amendment, so that the billions of U.S. taxpayer dollars given annually to the UN are not used to lobby for abortion. To that end, we also urge additional action to protect U.S. funds from being used by UN organizations to perform or promote abortions.

As you know, the Siljander Amendment, renewed annually since 1981 in the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs appropriations bill, prohibits U.S. funds from being “used to lobby for or against abortion.”² The intent of the amendment is, in the words of its sponsor, Rep. Mark Siljander, “to get the U.S. Government out of the business of financing the lobbying, promoting, and recommending of abortion.”³ The Siljander Amendment exists to protect the sovereignty of nations to enact their own laws and policies regarding abortion.

United States leaders and diplomats should insist that U.S.-supported international agreements and multilateral assistance do not include abortion under the guise of sexual and reproductive health. This insistence is necessary to enforce the Siljander Amendment. This oversight is especially necessary for UN organizations that receive billions of dollars in U.S. funding that are subject to the Siljander Amendment.

We join you in insisting that unqualified references to sexual and reproductive health or derivative terms that that can be interpreted to include abortion should be rejected in international agreements and assistance like the Global HRP. The Global HRP promotes abortion as having the same level of necessity as food through its provisions to “secure the continuity of the supply chain for essential commodities and services such as... sexual and reproductive health” and other provisions to accelerate “sexual and reproductive health services, including the Minimum Initial Service Package”.⁴ Since 2018, the UN-sponsored Inter-Agency Field Manual on Reproductive Health in Humanitarian Settings Minimum Initial Service Package for sexual and reproductive health explicitly includes “access to safe abortion to the full extent of the law” and provides for supplies for

¹ <https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/press-releases/may-18-2020-acting-administrator-john-barsa-un-secretary-general-antonio-guterres>

² The original 1981 Siljander Amendment only prohibited the use of U.S. funds to lobby for abortion. Since 1996, an additional prohibition on lobbying against abortion has been included.

³ Remarks by Rep. Mark Siljander, 127 Cong. Rec. 30808 (Dec. 11, 1981).

⁴ <https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/Global-Humanitarian-Response-Plan-COVID-19.pdf>

abortion, like manual vacuum aspiration and abortion-inducing drugs in humanitarian-response kits.⁵ Such references to abortion under sexual and reproductive health should be removed from the Global HRP and the UN's priorities in response to COVID-19 pandemic.

The Global HRP is only the latest example of the UN's brazen imposition of abortion and a fictitious international right to abortion, which violates the sovereignty of its member states and UN conventions that affirm the right to life. UN organizations that lobby for abortion include the World Health Organization,⁶ the United Nations Population Fund,⁷ the UN Commission on Human Rights,⁸ and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women.⁹

Therefore, we also urge additional action to protect U.S. funds from being used by UN organizations to perform or promote abortions. To enforce the Siljander Amendment, U.S. contributions to UN Secretary General and to UN organizations that lobby for abortion should be reduced in amounts proportional to their abortion-related lobbying, as was done to the Organization of American States (OAS) in 2019.¹⁰ Furthermore, the exemption for multilateral organizations from Protecting Life in Global Health Assistance (PLGHA) should be revoked. U.S. tax dollars should not finance UN organizations that perform or promote abortion as a method of family planning through voluntary contributions, including for global health activities. Such an expansion of PLGHA is allowed under section 301(a) of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 (22 U.S.C. 2221(a)), which authorizes the President to condition voluntary contributions to international organizations on "such terms and conditions as he may determine".

Again, we thank you for your strong stand against the imposition of abortion under the guise of sexual and reproductive health in the UN's Global HRP. We urge you to continue to these efforts, which serve to enforce, and by no means violate, the Siljander Amendment. We also urge action to protect U.S. funds from being used by UN organizations to perform or promote abortions. Thank you for your efforts to protect vulnerable unborn children as the U.S. leads the world in providing humanitarian assistance to those in need.

Sincerely,



James Lankford
US Senator



Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Member of Congress

⁵ <https://iawg.net/resources/safe-abortion-care-in-the-minimum-initial-service-package-misp-for-sexual-and-reproductive-health-in-humanitarian-settings>

⁶ <https://www.who.int/health-topics/abortion>
<https://abortion-policies.srhr.org/>

https://c-fam.org/friday_fax/who-urges-telemedicine-and-do-it-yourself-abortions-during-covid-pandemic/
<https://c-fam.org/wp-content/uploads/The-World-Health-Organization%E2%80%99s-Abortion-Overreach.pdf>

⁷ <https://adfinternational.org/resource/the-united-nations-population-fund-and-the-illicit-promotion-of-abortion/>

⁸ https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Women/WRGS/SexualHealth/INFO_Abortion_WEB.pdf

⁹ <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2019/progress-of-the-worlds-women-2019-2020-en.pdf?la=en&vs=3512>

<https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2019/6/feature-story-of-change-ireland-overturns-abortion-ban>

¹⁰ https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/pompeo-cuts-oas-funds-over-advocacy-of-legal-abortion/2019/03/26/4ea5314d-d7e0-48de-b636-e552447430b0_story.html



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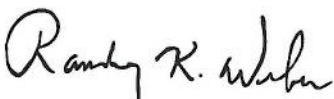
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CC: The Honorable Mike Pompeo, Secretary of the U.S. Department of State
The Honorable Alex Azar, Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services