

December 10, 2013

The Honorable Rajiv Shah
Administrator
United States Agency for International Development
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20523

Dear Administrator Shah,

Today is Human Rights Day and the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. In recognition of this milestone, we write to reaffirm that reproductive and sexual health care are core human rights. As former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton famously proclaimed, "women's rights are human rights." We wholeheartedly agree, and are therefore eager to support your agency's efforts to advance sexual and reproductive health and rights. Furthermore, as USAID considers a new strategy for programming in these areas, we encourage you to place particular focus on adolescent girls, who are the least equipped among all women to cope with the consequences of inadequate sexual and reproductive health care.

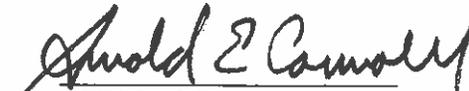
Empowering women and girls to determine the number and timing of their pregnancies directly impacts their well-being and the health of their communities. Yet the family planning needs of more than 220 million women in developing countries are still unmet. Moreover, too many young women globally lack self-determination, creating unique obstacles to accessing sexual and reproductive health care. When they cannot access appropriate information and care, the consequences are devastating. The leading cause of death among girls aged 15-19 in low- and middle-income countries is complications from pregnancy and childbirth. Infant mortality and malnutrition rates are also higher among children born to adolescent mothers. When adolescents do survive childbirth, these young mothers and their children face increased physical, social, and economic challenges.

For many years, USAID has played a critical role in advancing sexual and reproductive health rights, and we strongly support your recent increased focus on youth issues, such as child marriage. We thank you again for your leadership and urge you to remain steadfast in breaking down the significant barriers to comprehensive and rights-based health services faced by women and girls around the world.

Sincerely,

LOIS FRANKEL
Member of Congress

LOUISE SLAUGHTER
Member of Congress


GERRY CONNOLLY
Member of Congress

GRACE MENG
Member of Congress

DAVID CICILLINE
Member of Congress

MIKE HONDA
Member of Congress

JOSEPH KENNEDY III
Member of Congress

RAUL GRIJALVA
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ALAN LOWENTHAL
Member of Congress

AMI BERA
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JIM MCDERMOTT
Member of Congress

STEVE COHEN
Member of Congress


TULSI GABBARD
Member of Congress

HENRY C. "HANK" JOHNSON, JR.
Member of Congress

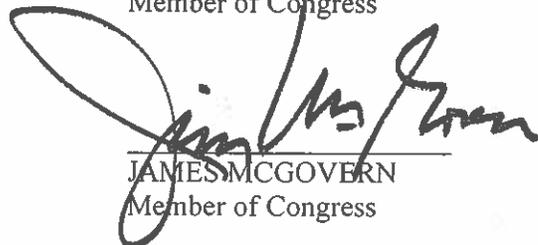
YVETTE CLARKE
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MICHELLE LUJAN GRISHAM
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ANN MCLANE KUSTER
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