

December 06, 2018

The Honorable Mike Pompeo  
Secretary of State  
2201 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Pompeo,

As U.S. organizations that promote health and human rights, we write to express strong opposition to any attempts by the United States Department of State to censor U.S. diplomats, or any mission staff or partners. Any such effort would jeopardize global health while undermining decades of global consensus and progress.

Specifically, we are concerned by recent reports that senior officials are considering prohibiting the use of well-defined technical terms, such as “sexual and reproductive health,” “comprehensive sexuality education,” and other terms relating to sex, sexuality, and gender. We are further concerned by U.S. efforts to roll back international consensus on these issues. For nearly 25 years, the international community has united consistently in support of sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, as established in the 1994 Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development. In 2015, the international community re-committed to take action to improve sexual and reproductive health and realize reproductive rights globally through the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights are fundamental to gender equality, as well as women’s, girls’ and young people’s empowerment and decision-making. By banning the use of these terms and support for these vital issues, the U.S. isolates itself and sends the message that advancing an extreme political agenda matters more than the health and rights of individuals and communities around the world.

This unprecedented proposal erases critical aspects of people’s health and lives. This, and previous attempts by Administration officials to remove references to “gender equality”, “adolescents”, evidence-based programs, “gender-based violence”, and transgender people, among others, from internationally negotiated documents, State Department reports, and domestic U.S. policies, aims to severely curtail progress on policies supporting gender equality and the health and human rights of women, girls and marginalized populations, including adolescents and LGBTQIA individuals.

Lastly, this proposal—and ongoing self-censorship within various agencies and bureaus—will have detrimental impacts on longstanding U.S. global health priorities such as reducing HIV and AIDS, maternal mortality, and reproductive cancers, among others. This proposal could foster confusion and cautiousness among implementers and could further stigmatize those seeking comprehensive healthcare services.

We urge you to reverse and prevent any future guidance or policy that prohibits the free speech of diplomats, mission staff, and partners or that compromises the health and wellbeing of women, men, young people, LGBTQIA individuals, communities, and families. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Advocates for Youth

AIDS United

American Jewish World Service

American Medical Student Association

American Society for Reproductive Medicine

Amnesty International USA

AVAC

Better World Campaign

CARE USA

Catholics for Choice

Center for Biological Diversity

Center for Constitutional Rights

Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE)

Center for Reproductive Rights

Common Defense

Council for Global Equality

Demand Progress

Feminist Majority Foundation

Foreign Policy for America

GirlForward

Girls Inc.

Global Fund for Women

Global Justice Center

Global Justice Institute, Metropolitan Community Churches

Global Rights for Women

Global Woman P.E.A.C.E. Foundation

Global Women's Institute

GLSEN

GreeneWorks

Guttmacher Institute

Heartland Alliance International

Human Rights Campaign

In Our Own Voice: National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda

interACT: Advocates for Intersex Youth

International Action Network for Gender Equity & Law

International Center for Research on Women (ICRW)

International Planned Parenthood Federation/Western Hemisphere Region

International Rescue Committee

International Women's Health Coalition

International Youth Alliance for Family Planning

Ipas

Jewish World Watch  
John Snow, Inc. (JSI)  
Milaan Foundation  
MPact Global Action for Gay Men's Health and Rights  
NARAL Pro-Choice America  
National Abortion Federation  
National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF)  
National Center for Transgender Equality  
National Institute for Reproductive Health  
National Network of Abortion Funds  
National Organization for Women  
National Partnership for Women & Families  
National Women's Health Network  
National Women's Law Center  
Open Society Foundations  
OutRight Action International  
Oxfam America  
PAI  
Partners In Health  
People For the American Way  
Physicians for Reproductive Health  
Plan International USA  
Planned Parenthood Federation of America  
Population Connection Action Fund  
Population Institute  
Promundo-US  
Public Citizen  
Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS)  
Shadhika  
Synergía - Initiatives for Human Rights  
The AIDS Institute  
The United Methodist Church - General Board of Church and Society  
Treatment Action Group  
Union for Reform Judaism  
United Nations Association of the United States  
UPIC Health  
URGE: Unite for Reproductive & Gender Equity  
Win Without War  
Women Graduates-USA  
Women of Reform Judaism  
Women's Refugee Commission  
Woodhull Freedom Foundation