

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 19, 2017

The Honorable Ambassador Nikki Haley
Permanent U.S. Representative to the United Nations
United States Mission to the United Nations
799 United Nations Plaza
New York, N.Y. 10017

Dear Ambassador Haley,

We write with great concern over recent actions by the United States to restrict sexual and reproductive health and rights globally, particularly through forums at the United Nations (UN). Limitations on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) run contrary to U.S. laws, policies, and programmatic priorities both domestically and internationally. These limitations will have a detrimental impact on the rights and health of women and girls worldwide as well as on the United States' reputation at home and abroad. We are especially concerned by recent actions taken by the U.S. Mission to the United Nations (USUN) and its delegates at the recent Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) and Commission on Population and Development (CPD). These two forums serve as critical international mechanisms to advance the rights of women and girls, including their sexual and reproductive rights. Actions taken by the U.S., such as the explanation of our country's position at CSW that the U.S. does not recognize an international right to abortion, demonstrate a complete lack of understanding and blatant disregard for the integral role that SRHR play in women's lives and also detrimentally impact the U.S.'s own ability to achieve our broad foreign policy and development goals. We call on you to clarify the U.S. position on SRHR at the UN and ensure it is aligned with our existing programs and priorities – and with the general views of the citizens of the United States.¹

The U.S. has long supported sexual and reproductive health and rights abroad through our foreign aid and development programs and we are deeply concerned about actions the Administration has taken recently that limit these rights. A regression in our country's support for SRHR will undermine both our own development programs as well as efforts other countries are taking to advance these rights through international mechanisms and global commitments. These actions include:

- Using factually inaccurate information as a false justification to withhold U.S. funding for the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) under the Kemp-Kasten Amendment. UNFPA serves as the world's principal multilateral provider of family planning and reproductive health services and the largest global provider of maternal health care in humanitarian emergencies. The notification of this action on April 3, 2017 was especially alarming given UNFPA's leadership role in co-convening and providing technical expertise at CPD, which began its 50th Session the very same day.
- Designating a civil society delegate to the CSW who denies the role that birth control has played in the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women and girls. The delegate's beliefs run counter to the experiences of women in the United States where legal access to birth control

¹ Pew Research Center - <http://www.people-press.org/2016/10/27/as-election-nears-voters-divided-over-democracy-and-respect/>.

has helped to narrow the wage gap and enabled women to better participate in the work force, and to experiences globally where access to contraception has contributed to significant decreases in maternal and child mortality.²

- Expressing support for efforts to eliminate discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity without supporting sexual rights and comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services at CSW and CPD. These positions are completely contradictory, as sexual rights include the principle that discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity is unacceptable. Furthermore, it is often the most marginalized communities, such as LGBTQ individuals, adolescent girls, and people with disabilities, among others, who face the most significant barriers to accessing health services and exercising their sexual and reproductive rights. By failing to recognize these rights and explicitly ensuring access to these services, the U.S. is undermining efforts to make meaningful progress in the proliferation of autonomous human rights and protecting the most vulnerable.

The positions taken by this Administration, including USUN, deny sexual and reproductive health as a key part of health care for women and young people, and undermine sexual and reproductive rights. Recognition and approval of these autonomous rights are integral to discussions on women's rights and empowerment, population, and development. Reports that the United States is not advocating for the inclusion of these priorities in international negotiations are disturbing. We urge you to change course and clarify the U.S. position on these issues.

The United States must continue be a leader in promoting the empowerment of women and girls, and in the acceptance of sexual identification and freedom from discrimination. That leadership includes continuing to promote access to comprehensive and integrated sexual and reproductive health services, including comprehensive sexuality education, and respecting, protecting, and fulfilling the sexual and reproductive rights of all people. Leadership in these areas also demands that we be ever vigilant in protecting and advancing those rights both here at home and in international forums. While we still have much ground to cover in our own country, there are many countries also working to advance these issues. These countries look to international agreements and standards for guidance on developing and implementing their national policies. The U.S. should never be a barrier to the progress pursued by other countries; rather, we should support these countries in those efforts. We are deeply concerned that the Administration is moving towards being an obstacle in the promotion of SRHRs worldwide, including through our role at the UN. Moving forward, we expect that the U.S. position will recognize and reflect the importance of SRHR in international policy discussions. We look forward to your response on this matter.

Sincerely,

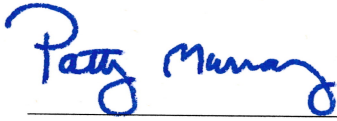


RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
United States Senate



JEANNE SHAHEEN
United States Senate

² <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3684076/>



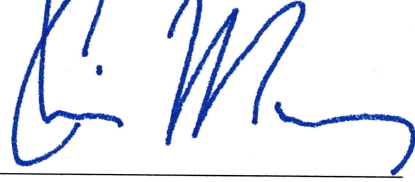
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United States Senate



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United States Senate



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