

From Canada's Allies for Reproductive Rights: A letter of action in response to Trump's 'Gag Rule'

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As Canadian advocates for women's health, we feel compelled to act in solidarity with our American and global colleagues and to speak out against the recent reinstatement of the Mexico City Policy by President Donald J. Trump.

Also known as the [Global Gag Rule](#), this policy prohibits non-governmental organizations that provide abortion counselling or referrals from receiving US foreign aid. Many of these organizations provide comprehensive reproductive and sexual health services, including access to family planning services, HIV care and maternal health programs. Research has shown that policies prohibiting abortion and family planning counselling lead to [more unwanted pregnancies, higher rates of sexually transmitted infections, and more illness and death from unsafe abortions](#). The [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#) estimates that each year five million women suffer disability and a further 47 000 lose their lives to complications of unsafe abortions. As the largest donor in global health funding, the US stands to retract nearly [\\$10 billion \(US\) from reproductive health programs](#). The family planning organization [Marie Stopes International](#) has estimated that if funding cannot be replaced, Trump's Gag Rule will result in 6.5 million unintentional pregnancies, 2.2 million unsafe abortions and 21, 700 pregnancy related deaths during the Trump administration.

Those affected by the Gag Rule include young women like Nyla. She is a 16-yr old girl from [Lesotho](#), a landlocked country in southern Africa. Nyla was orphaned and left in charge of her four siblings and the family farm. She didn't want to become pregnant but in a region [where one in five women](#) will have a live birth by their 18th birthday, the odds were very much against her. In order to receive care, she walked 4 hours to a family planning clinic built in part with [USAID funding](#).

Our medical colleagues who run this clinic are doing the best they can with limited resources to meet the needs of the women they serve. They are now left scrambling to ensure that they can keep the clinic open and continue their important work.

Canadian organizations such as the [Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada \(SOGC\)](#), [Doctors Without Borders Canada/ Medecins Sans Frontieres \(MSF\)](#) and the [Canadian Partnership for Women and Children's Health](#) have worked at the frontlines providing care to women like Nyla. These women and the organizations that support them will suffer significant hardship under [Trump's policies](#).

As clinicians committed to providing high quality patient-centered care for all women, we have witnessed the ways in which poverty, violence, mental health, substance

use and gender injustice shape our patients' lives on a daily basis. The work we do is intertwined with social and political mandates that impact the health of women we care for every day. In Canada, we have [no criminal laws against abortion](#) and the vast majority of Canadians [support the right of women](#) to choose whether to end a pregnancy. We are fortunate to deliver comprehensive and non-judgmental reproductive and sexual healthcare, including [safe and legal abortions](#). We recognize the value of health as a human right. Trump's decision to reimpose the Global Gag Rule jeopardizes this right.

We can not stand by silently in the face of this threat. We urge the Canadian government to increase development financing in reproductive health and safety programming, particularly contraception and safe abortion services where legally permitted. The Canadian government has an opportunity to be a leader in response to [Trump's "war on women"](#) and to advocate for the decriminalization of abortion around the world. International Development Minister Marie-Claude Bibeau committed Canada to join the Dutch government in their [recent establishment](#) of an international fund to mitigate the impact of the Global Gag Rule. Thank you. Let's do more.

We urge Canadians to demand that our government continue to advance women's rights. This past week, despite Trump's brazen decrees to strip financial and political support from some of the world's most vulnerable, we witnessed the empowering global Women's March. We must continue to march, advocate and act. By speaking up on social media, hosting community fundraising and advocacy events, and writing to [Honorable Minister Marie-Claude Bibeau](#), to the [local Member of Parliament \(MP\)](#) or to the [local Member of Provincial Member of Parliament \(MPP\)](#) in support of funding and [innovative strategies](#) for women's reproductive and sexual health care, Canadians can continue to demonstrate leadership that is aligned with our purported values – human rights, respect for law and gender equality.

As proud members of a Canadian community of clinicians, we hold our government and civil society organizations accountable to promises of increased investments in advocacy initiatives and for the provision of comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services, including safe abortion and post-abortion care. We must step up our collective efforts to safeguard and advance sexual and reproductive health rights locally, nationally and globally.

This letter is endorsed by specialists in obstetrics and gynecology, family medicine, and public health.

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