

# U.S. Antiabortion Policy May Increase Abortions

*The full impact of the Administration's 3-year-old international family planning policy is yet to be felt, say birth control advocates*

FAMILY planning groups are predicting that there will be substantial increases in unwanted pregnancies and abortions in developing countries as a result of the Administration's aggressive new anti-abortion policy. But because of the staggered mode of its implementation, the policy's real impact is yet to be felt, according to family planning advocates who recently held a press conference on the implications of the so-called "Mexico City" policy adopted in 1984. The policy prohibits grants to foreign organizations that use non-U.S. funds for abortion-related activities.

Compliance has been staggered because it is only required when agreements between the Agency for International Development (AID) and its grantees are renewed. AID has already stopped contributions to the International Planned Parenthood Federation and the United Nations Family Planning Agency, both of which depended on the United States for about 25% of their budgets.

Time is now running out on the cooperative agreement between AID and its largest American grantee, Family Planning International Assistance (FPIA), the international arm of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America. The 5-year agreement with FPIA, which gets 95% of its money from AID, is scheduled to expire on 31 December. Planned Parenthood has refused to sign the antiabortion clause now required by AID and has brought suit in New York against the policy, claiming that its implementation is unconstitutional.

According to a study by Charles R. Hamerslough of the University of Michigan, a cutoff in AID funds for FPIA, which has programs in 35 countries, would result in a significant increase in abortions. He predicted that fewer than one-third of those who lost services from FPIA-funded programs would continue use of contraceptives. He calculated that in the first 3 years there would be 311,000 additional births, 1,200 additional maternal deaths from pregnancies, and 69,000 more abortions.

Sharon L. Camp, vice president of the Population Crisis Committee, has conduct-

ed a study of the effects of the Mexico City policy. At a joint news conference with Planned Parenthood's president Faye Wattleton, Camp said that the exemptions and the "piecemeal implementation" of the new policy have made it "less onerous and its impact more drawn out." For example, of 31 major AID "cooperating agencies" dispensing family planning funds abroad, only 9 are so far operating under the new policy, and the operations of only 6 have been "seriously affected."

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However, Camp went on to predict a radical rearrangement of the international family planning scene, characterized by increased politicization of an already sensitive field and the freezing out of established private organizations, which she said would result in more unwanted births and abortions as well as adverse effects on indigenous programs related to women's health.

Among the "larger negative trends" cited by Camp:

- The clause does not apply to grants made directly to foreign governments. Therefore, funding will shift to governments and government agencies at the expense of indigenous private organizations even though the latter are more effective. This will be particularly detrimental in Latin America and Africa where private participation is crucial.

- Since contracts are also exempted from the clause, funding will shift away from grants and cooperative agreements to contractors with unproven expertise. This change "risks stifling the very private-sector innovators who have driven international

family planning efforts in the past."

- There is a high risk of "inadvertent" violations of the policy in countries where abortion is nominally illegal but widely accepted—as is the case in many populous countries including Brazil, Nigeria, and Indonesia.

- The policy has far-reaching effects in countries where abortion is legal. In India, for example, many groups feel they can do little further work because they will have to turn down proposals from important Indian family planning groups. In Brazil, where there is a national debate on abortion, an organization refused even a no-strings-attached grant of private money from an AID-funded organization because it "wished no further association with any American organization linked to such an onerous U.S. policy."

- The policy is contributing to the "increasing isolation" of legal providers of abortion. Some no longer have access to postabortion contraceptive supplies because nonprofit service providers fear their standing will be jeopardized. One Asian organization turned down a request for a new sterilization service for this reason. "Such a trend must inevitably lead to more abortion."

- The "generalized chilling effect" of the policy is inhibiting data gathering and information. One group went so far as to remove all tabs in its files that had the word "abortion." Another destroyed thousands of copies of expensive medical textbooks donated to it because they included a section on pregnancy termination. Another phased out a study on the health consequences of illegal abortions.

An AID official defends the Administration policy, saying "we can't detect any real change" so far in the way programs are being run. "I believe we will be able to continue to have a viable family planning program." AID population officials, understandably, have difficulty defending with conviction a policy that was engineered by a group—the right-to-life community—whose goal is the elimination of all family planning programs.

Congress has yet to take definitive action with regard to the Mexico City policy. Senator Daniel Inouye (D-HI) has introduced amendments to the foreign aid appropriations bill that would permit resumption of support for the U.N. population program and exempt international and nongovernmental organizations from the antiabortion clause (it is already long-standing AID policy not to directly fund abortion-related activities). The Senate has included Inouye's amendments into the fiscal 1988 continuing budget resolution. ■

CONSTANCE HOLDEN