

January 28, 2019

To: Members of Congress

As leading civil society organizations focused on gender equality, we write to welcome you to the 116th Congress and to share an overview of the issues and constituencies we represent. In the enclosed packet you will find the latest information on global gender equality issues, outlining core priorities for U.S. foreign policy and assistance that will ensure U.S. leadership on behalf of the most marginalized.

The priorities outlined below reflect the importance of effective policies serving all persons across their lifespans, regardless of gender or identity, and recognize that people's complex identities, including their nationality, race, religion, ethnic identity, ability, and more, impact whether they can access or fully enjoy their rights. These priorities put the needs of the most vulnerable at the center of U.S. foreign policy and assistance, recognizing that too often the experiences of women, girls, and LGBTI people have been at the margins. These undervalued members of society face violations of their human rights in staggeringly high numbers, yet deserve equal economic, educational, social, and political opportunities.

Although we represent different sector priorities—health, economic empowerment, education, girls' rights, LGBTI people's rights, prevention of violence, promotion of peace—**we come together with one voice to urge the 116th Congress to prioritize legislation, oversight, and funding that directly promotes and advances gender equality and human rights regardless of sex, sexual orientation, or gender identity and expression.** In addition to making the larger case for U.S. investment in these issues, each of our coalitions has articulated specific legislative priorities for the 116th Congress that we look forward to discussing with you.

This is a critical moment in which rising tides of nationalism, sexism, and racism have been met with a wave of women's leadership, and the U.S. Congress is more diverse and representative than ever before in its history. U.S. leadership for the advancement of the human rights of women and girls and gender equality is needed now more than ever. The priorities we outline here enjoy broad support and are directly responsive to the issues that impact gender equality. While specific actions are led and supported by various coalitions and organizations and not all signatories have a position or expertise on all of the priorities here, all of the undersigned are united in our support for gender equality, human rights, and the empowerment of women and girls. It is in this spirit and at this moment that we make the below requests of Congress as a broad and diverse community of advocates focused on gender equality:

Support robust funding for global gender equality

Robust funding for gender programming that is strategic, coordinated, and easy to track, monitor, and evaluate will increase the effectiveness of U.S. assistance dollars throughout the U.S. foreign assistance portfolio. We urge you to increase (at or above \$1.9b annually) investments in programs addressing gender equality; gender-based violence; women's leadership; sexual and reproductive health and rights; women, peace and security; and harmful

practices like child, early and forced marriage, and female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C). Our SFOPS request from FY 2019 is included for reference. These investments must not come at the expense of poverty fighting, anti-human trafficking, global health, education, or humanitarian assistance accounts. Maintaining U.S. leadership in gender equality furthermore requires maintaining the International Affairs Budget (function 150) at no less than the current enacted level and continuing to support LGBTI-inclusive development. We further urge you to protect investments in international family planning and reproductive (FP/RH) health programs, which are critical to ensuring gender equality globally and to promoting the health and well-being of women and girls, young people, and families around the world. The United States cannot fully and successfully prevent and mitigate the negative impacts of child, early, and forced marriage; early pregnancy; and gender-based violence and advance gender equality; girls' education; and women's economic empowerment without ensuring women and girls can access the family planning information and services that they want and need.

Support evidence-based programming and solutions

Committees should use hearings and investigations as a way to ensure that the work of Congress and the administration is led by solutions that are based in fact and science. This should include utilizing Congress' accountability and oversight role to ensure that political nominees and appointees in key global health, development, humanitarian, and diplomatic positions have the knowledge and experience necessary to effectively lead and support comprehensive, evidence-based, medically-accurate interventions, policies and reporting that advance the health and human rights of women, young people, families, and marginalized communities. PEPFAR's DREAMS program is an excellent example of evidence-based programming that has addressed the link between gender inequality and vulnerability to HIV.

Ensure accountability and U.S. leadership for gender equality at USAID and the U.S. State Department

Congress has a critical oversight role to play with the U.S. State Department and USAID in ensuring the United States continues to defend these critical human rights. Congress must ensure these agencies defend and strengthen commitments to gender equality policies, analysis, programs, and staffing at U.S. government agencies, especially at the U.S. State Department and USAID. We know that stable, prosperous countries, the ones that are the strongest partners to the United States in today's challenging world, have invested in human rights and gender equality, thus we need to retain and strengthen the architecture for gender equality in U.S. foreign policy and assistance, from implementing policies to filling staff positions.

Moreover, Congress should hold agencies tasked with delivering U.S. foreign policy and assistance accountable for ensuring that gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment is core to their missions. Gender equality and women's empowerment must be a strong basis of USAID's Transformation, and all policies and practice should reflect and build on best practices and a robust evidence base. Congress should also ensure that the U.S. State Department does not sideline women's and LGBTI rights, particularly in its Human Rights Reports, which recently

cut sections on reproductive rights and significantly narrowed sections analyzing gender-based violence.

Honor our commitments to global gender equality and human rights standards

Congress has a critical role to play in ensuring the U.S. government maintains its commitments and progress on gender equality, including in ensuring we do not roll back internationally understood and agreed-upon terminology or methodologies.

- Moves by the State Department to strike or limit women’s rights, reproductive rights and LGBTI people’s rights from its Human Rights Reports, or to prohibit U.S. diplomats from using well-defined and established terminology like, “sexual and reproductive health,” “comprehensive sexuality education,” and other terms relating to sex, sexuality, and gender, put the United States at odds not only with international standards but also our own, existing strategies and best practices.
- With regard to our own U.S. foreign policies and approach to gender in development, the same is true. There have been recent, troubling attempts by U.S. agencies to replace the term “gender equality” in official documents with language that unduly narrows its meaning. These language changes have real consequences: they effectively erase transgender people and furthermore ignore the systemic realities of gender power imbalance that must be addressed for all people to live free from violence and for society to overcome gender bias. Congress must ensure that the U.S. Government policy and practice recognizes the inherent discrimination and deeply problematic impact narrowing terminology has on the rights of all people, regardless of their gender.
- Finally, the United States has been the architect of a number of foreign policies and strategies with regard to various gender equality issues; Congress should codify and support the full implementation of these important strategies and policies, including:
 - The U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls (the first of any country)
 - The National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security
 - The Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally
 - Various agency-level (State, USAID, MCC, USADF) gender policies

Promote the rights of LGBTI people globally

The protection of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) people globally is central to gender equality and the realization of human rights. Countries that deny the rights – or even the existence – of LGBTI minorities are equally likely to deny the human rights of other marginalized or disfavored minorities, and societies that criminalize their LGBTI citizens based on rigid gender stereotypes also are far more likely to limit the opportunities and contributions of women and girls within their societies, often based on those very same gender stereotypes. Together, these rigid gender stereotypes limit the civic, economic, and political development of countries worldwide. Additionally, LGBTI people are oftentimes the most violently persecuted minorities in countries around the world, experiencing high levels of gender-based violence. Violence by both private individuals and the state continues to violate the most basic human rights of LGBTI individuals, and serve to further undermine any progress for gender equality.

Any moves by the U.S. government to weaken LGBTI rights adversely impact women and girls, including efforts to silo gender efforts to only address a narrow and incomplete set of women's issues. In contrast, efforts to promote LGBTI rights have important ancillary benefits in promoting social acceptance and understanding across minority groups and in support of equal rights for women and girls globally.

Oppose efforts to introduce and codify new and existing harmful policies that undermine health and human rights, including the global gag rule

The expanded global gag rule (also known as the Mexico City policy) impedes access to critical, life-saving health care globally by cutting off global health funding to experienced providers and interfering with the doctor-patient relationship by restricting providers from giving their patients accurate information, referrals, and services based on their needs. This undercuts both U.S. global health investments and communities who already face systematic barriers to care and rights globally. Congress should work to permanently repeal the global gag rule and should oppose any efforts to introduce and codify new and existing harmful policies that undermine sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Support rights-focused U.S. engagement in multilateral fora:

Clear U.S. leadership in the United Nations and other multilateral fora is essential to advancing critical national interests on a range of issues, including gender equality and the rights and empowerment of women and girls. Congress must push for the United States to re-engage with the UN Human Rights Council and pursue a positive voting record on critical human rights resolutions and mechanisms for all people, including women and girls and LGBTI people. Additionally, Congress should push for the U.S. mission to the United Nations (USUN) to advance positive, rights-based work and to not seek to undermine advancements in the rights of women and girls, including through seeking to change previously agreed-upon language regarding gender and supplanting it with "women and girls."

Congress has the opportunity and responsibility to ensure that the United States continues to support global efforts to advance gender equality and the rights of women and girls. We hope to work alongside you in this effort. Included in this packet is an introduction to each coalition, including our contact information. Please do not hesitate to reach out to any of us so we may be of service and help Congress act to ensure everyone has the full enjoyment of their rights.

Sincerely,

1. ActionAid USA
2. Advancing Girls' Education in Africa (AGE Africa)
3. Advocates for Youth
4. African Cultural Alliance of North America Inc.
5. Alliance for Peacebuilding
6. American Jewish World Service

7. Amnesty International USA
8. Be Girl
9. CARE USA
10. Center for Biological Diversity
11. Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE)
12. Center for Reproductive Rights
13. Center for Victims of Torture
14. Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL)
15. Chicago Foundation for Women
16. Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, US Provinces
17. Consortium on Gender, Security and Human Rights
18. Council for Global Equality
19. Double Hope Films
20. Equality Now
21. Evangelical Lutheran Church of America
22. Feminist Majority Foundation
23. Foreign Policy for America
24. Free the Slaves
25. Futures Without Violence
26. Gender Action
27. Genocide Watch
28. Girl Determined
29. Girl Rising
30. Girl Up
31. GirlForward
32. Girls Learn International
33. Global Fund for Women
34. Global Justice Institute, Metropolitan Community Churches
35. Global Rights for Women
36. Global Women's Institute
37. GreeneWorks
38. Harpswell Foundation
39. Human Rights Campaign
40. Humanity & Inclusion
41. Heartland Alliance International
42. Inter-African Committee-USA
43. interACT: Advocates for Intersex Youth
44. International Action Network for Gender Equity & Law (IANGEL)
45. International Center for Research on Women (ICRW)
46. International Civil Society Action Network

47. International Women's Health Coalition
48. International Youth Alliance for Family Planning
49. International Youth Foundation
50. Ipas
51. IREX
52. Jewish Women International
53. Jewish World Watch
54. John Snow, Inc. (JSI)
55. Landesa
56. MADRE
57. Mercy Corps
58. Milaan Foundation
59. National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
60. National Association of Social Workers
61. National Center for Lesbian Rights
62. National Center for Transgender Equality
63. National Network to End Domestic Violence
64. National Organization for Women
65. North American MenEngage Network
66. OutRight Action International
67. Oxfam America
68. PAI
69. Partnerships For Health
70. PATH
71. Pathfinder International
72. Peace X Peace
73. Plan International USA
74. Planned Parenthood Federation of America
75. Population Connection Action Fund
76. Population Council
77. Population Institute
78. Project Concern International
79. Promundo-US
80. READ Global (Rural Education and Development)
81. Restless Development
82. Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights
83. Saferworld
84. Save the Children
85. Shadhika
86. Somali Health Care Advocates

87. Synergía - Initiatives for Human Rights
88. The Advocates for Human Rights
89. The Center for Sexual Pleasure and Health
90. The Episcopal Church
91. The Hunger Project
92. The United Methodist Church - General Board of Church and Society
93. The US End FGM/C Network
94. Too Young to Wed
95. U.S. National Committee for UN Women
96. Union for Reform Judaism
97. United Nations Association of the United States of America
98. United States International Council on Disabilities
99. Universal Access Project
100. Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights
101. USA Mali Charitable Association of NYC
102. V-Day
103. Vital Voices Global Partnership
104. WeSpeakOut
105. What Works Association
106. Women for Afghan Women
107. Women for Women International
108. Women Graduates-USA
109. Women In International Security (WIIS)
110. Women of Reform Judaism
111. Women Watch Afrika
112. Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO)
113. Women's Refugee Commission
114. Woodhull Freedom Foundation
115. World Education (WEI)
116. World Learning
117. YWCA USA
118. Zonta International