

18 November 2015

Hon. Børge Brende
Minister of Foreign Affairs
7. juni-plassen
Victoria Terrasse
Oslo, NORWAY

Dear Minister Brende,

For many years your Ministry has partnered with our organisations and as a result has contributed to substantial achievements in gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). While our organisations have unique approaches and areas of expertise, we are united in our gratitude and respect for Norway's historical and bold leadership on these often neglected global issues. Although we appreciate urgent needs related to the current refugee crisis and Norway's commitment to addressing them, we are writing to express our concerns about the impact of possible reallocations in the aid budget. In particular, we hope that the proposed substantial reductions in support for women and gender equality will be reconsidered, as these would have serious consequences for the health and lives of millions of women and girls, and their families, across the world.

Unfortunately, global politics and the current aid architecture continue to isolate the more sensitive and politicised aspects of SRHR, especially programming for training, advocacy, and research that addresses access to safe abortion. Norway has been one of a handful of donors willing to support work in this and other neglected areas like female genital mutilation (FGM), and LGBT rights.

The critical support your Ministry has provided to our organisations over the years has resulted in tangible progress in the areas of gender equality, SRHR and safe abortion. Achievements include:

- **expanded access to comprehensive sexuality education**, to help young people make informed decisions throughout their lives about sexuality and health
- **greater availability and accessibility of contraception and safe abortion care**, which has contributed to an estimated 44% overall decline in maternal deaths worldwide between 1990 and 2015. FP2020 estimates that an unprecedented 290.6 million women and girls in the world's poorest countries are now using modern contraception. From July 2014 through July 2015 alone, 80 million unintended pregnancies, 26.8 million unsafe abortions and 111,000 maternal deaths have been averted due to use of modern methods of contraception.
- **increased access to safe abortion** through strengthened capacity of public and private health systems and widespread legal reform (for example, Nepal, Kenya, Ethiopia) which has led to a significant decrease both in stigma for women and girls seeking services and in abortion-related deaths (estimated at 47,000 in 2008, with new and lower estimates expected shortly from the World Health Organization)
- **advances in gender equity**, with gender parity almost achieved at primary level and the percentage of women in parliaments having nearly doubled in the last 20 years
- **greater awareness of, and respect for, SRHR** both globally as reflected in the new Sustainable Development Goals' targets (3.7, 5.6) and nationally as we have seen many governments across the world increase their investment in reproductive health (for example, with 36 countries now having made FP2020 commitments)
- **more robust evidence on SRH needs and interventions** to guide policies and programmes, and
- **strengthened, more effective civil society support and advocacy** in many countries in support of women's health and rights.

Despite these achievements, significant needs remain. Continued investment in the programmes that have helped bring about these changes is essential and will be fundamental to achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

In closing, we would like to underscore that our partnerships with the Ministry are highly valued by our organisations' staff and partners in every region. In view of the significant global needs that remain in SRHR, it is our strong hope that we can continue our important and productive collaboration, to ensure that gains made are not lost and that access to lifesaving services that are critical to women's ability to exercise their rights can continue to be expanded.

Thank you for your consideration. Please let us know if we can provide any additional information.

Sincerely,



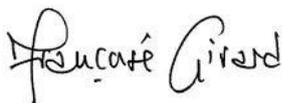
Hans Vemer, CEO, Concept Foundation



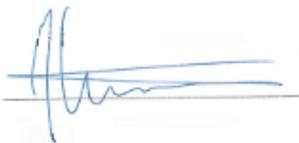
Ann Starrs, President and CEO, Guttmacher Institute



Tewodros Melesse, Director-General, International Planned Parenthood Federation



Françoise Girard, President, International Women's Health Coalition



John Hetherington, President and CEO, Ipas



Simon Cooke, CEO, Marie Stopes International

Cc via email: Hon. Mr. Henrik Asheim and Hon. Ms. Stine Renate Håheim, Chairs, All-Party Parliamentary Group on SRHR; Hon. Marit Nybakk and Hon. Anniken Huitfeldt, Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence