STATEMENT

The UK All-Party Parliamentary Group on Population, Development and Reproductive Health (APPG on PDRH) statement on UK aid cuts to sexual and reproductive health programmes

In the Queen’s Speech this week, the Government committed to ‘continue to provide aid where it has the greatest impact on reducing poverty and alleviating human suffering.’

This is a welcome statement. Yet the details of the cuts to UK aid that have emerged in recent weeks show a series of devastating cuts to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) programmes in developing countries. Investment in SRHR is one of the best ways to reduce poverty and alleviate human suffering. These cuts will have immediate, life-altering, generational consequences for women and girls, and the communities and countries they live in. The details so far include:

- Cuts of 85% (£130 million) to the flagship UNFPA Supplies Partnership. The Partnership reduces the price of global contraceptive supplies and provides NGOs and health ministries in developing countries with contraceptives and medicines essential to sexual and reproductive health;
- Cuts of 60% (£12 million) to UNFPA core operating funding which supports their lifesaving work;
- No further funding to the UK’s flagship Women’s Integrated Sexual Health (WISH) programme, responsible for providing six million couples with access to life-saving contraception each year;
- Closure of the UK Aid Connect Programme, ACCESS, which worked to reach the world’s most marginalised communities with comprehensive SRHR to help them adapt and become more resilient to climate change and humanitarian crises; and
- Cuts of 83% to UNAIDS, which coordinates global efforts to provide treatment, care and support for those living with HIV/AIDS and prevent transmission of HIV.

The UNFPA Supplies Partnership would have helped prevent around 250,000 maternal and child deaths, 14.6 million unintended pregnancies and 4.3 million unsafe abortions. The cuts to the WISH programme will mean International Planned Parenthood Federation will have to close 4,500 clinics and service delivery points globally, losing over 480 members of in-country staff supporting SRHR service delivery. MSI Reproductive Choices fears that the damage caused to women’s lives and futures by these cuts will be worse than the impact of Trump’s Global Gag Rule.

For decades, the UK has championed the fundamental rights of women and girls to have control over their own bodies and now, in the midst of a pandemic, is not the time to renege on our commitments. The cuts will cost lives, hinder the struggle for gender equality, and make it nearly impossible for the Government to keep its manifesto promises on girls’ education and ending preventable maternal, new-born and child deaths.
Cutting funding to SRHR doesn’t just cost lives, it costs money. UNFPA estimates that for every $1 spent on family planning, governments can save up to $6, and the Guttmacher Institute estimates that every $1 spent on contraceptive services beyond the current level would save $3 in the cost of maternal, new-born and abortion care. These aid cuts risk undermining decades of progress funded by UK taxpayers and upending the lives of girls and women across the globe.

The All Party Parliamentary Group for Population, Development and Reproductive Health calls on the UK Government to:

- reinstate 0.7% of GNI to Official Development Assistance as soon as possible and set out a timeline for doing so;
- restore funding to SRHR programmes, including the flagship WISH programme, UK Aid Connect SRHR projects, such as ACCESS, UNFPA Core funding and the UNFPA Supplies Partnership Programme;
- champion SRHR at the upcoming G7 summit, committing political and financial support to achieving universal access to comprehensive SRH services for women and girls.

On behalf of the APPG on PDRH,

Baroness Sugg  
Co-Chair APPG on PDRH

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The APPG on PDRH advocates for the full implementation of the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action and holds that universal access to contraceptive and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) services are paramount to girls’ education, gender equality, ending preventable deaths and sustainable development.

For further information, please contact the APPG on PDRH’s Parliamentary and Policy Advisor, Mette Kjaerby at kjaerbym@parliament.uk