

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 14, 2005

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New Analysis Shows U.S. Global AIDS Policy Further Undermining HIV Prevention in Sub-Saharan Africa

Funding for abstinence and faithfulness programs under the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) increasingly replaced comprehensive HIV prevention in fiscal years 2004 and 2005, and the U.S. is sending fewer condoms abroad today than in 1990, according to two new analyses by the Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE). The analyses show that shifts in prevention policy acutely affect sub-Saharan Africa, the region hardest hit by the HIV epidemic. [Find a summary of key findings at www.genderhealth.org/AIDS.php.]

"PEPFAR policies and funding streams do not reflect the needs of the people at highest risk of HIV infection," stated Jodi Jacobson, Executive Director of CHANGE. In sub-Saharan Africa, 80 percent of new infections are the result of unprotected sex, often within marriage. The highest rates of new infection are among those ages 15 to 24 and among married women in their twenties and thirties.

New guidance by the Office of the Global AIDS Coordinator (OGAC), first reported in the *Baltimore Sun* on December 10, 2005, requires that two-thirds of all funding for prevention of sexual transmission in fiscal year 2006 be spent on abstinence and faithfulness programs. Jacobson argues, "OGAC has far greater leeway in interpreting prevention policies in support of comprehensive approaches, but is refusing to take a broader approach in the interest of catering to a narrow ideological agenda."

According to CHANGE, this guidance reflects the on-going change in U.S. HIV prevention policy. This includes moving from comprehensive strategies toward abstinence-only and be faithful programs for the general population; flat funding for condom procurement and condom distribution; and condom social marketing only for specific groups such as commercial sex workers and truck drivers.

"On my recent trip to Nigeria," reported Jacobson, "I found growing resistance to and resentment of the restrictions imposed on prevention programs by PEPFAR among women's groups, youth groups, treatment advocates, medical professionals, and government and donor officials." In Nigeria, where 55 percent of those ages 15 to 24 are already sexually active, effective condom social marketing programs previously funded by the United States are being replaced by abstinence messages, such as the "Zip Up" campaign. At the same time, large amounts of funding are being granted to faith-based groups rather than public health institutions.

"In 2004, we sent fewer condoms and more stigmatizing messages to Africa in the face of an epidemic that is driven primarily by unsafe sex," asserted Jacobson. "With 5 million new infections each year, this approach cannot be justified. We call on the Bush Administration to revoke the restrictions on prevention funding and engage in a transparent process of reviewing the goals, objectives, and procurement procedures for prevention programs under PEPFAR."

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The Center for Health and Gender Equity is a U.S.-based non-governmental organization focused on the effects of U.S. international policies on the health and rights of women, girls, and other vulnerable populations in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. www.genderhealth.org. If you have difficulties viewing this message or wish to unsubscribe, please e-mail change@genderhealth.org.