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Global health and foreign policy

Letter dated 2 December 2020 from the Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

The United States has the honour to call your attention to the Geneva Consensus Declaration on Promoting Women's Health and Strengthening the Family (see annex), whose four main objectives are: (a) to secure meaningful health and development gains for women; (b) to protect life at all stages; (c) to declare the sovereign right of every nation to make its own laws protecting life, absent external pressure; and (d) to defend the family as foundational to any healthy society. The United States strongly supports the dignity of all human beings and protecting life from the moment of conception throughout the lifespan. On 22 October 2020, 32 countries signed the Geneva Consensus Declaration on Promoting Women's Health and Strengthening the Family, a document committing our nations to fighting for these shared priorities in various forums across the globe, including at the United Nations. Since then, two additional countries have joined. The United States invites all Member States to sign the declaration.

The United States, along with our like-minded partners, believes strongly that there is no international right to abortion and that the United Nations must respect national laws and policies on the matter, absent external pressure.

We respectfully ask that you circulate the present letter and its annex to all Member States as a document of the General Assembly under agenda item 131, which is currently scheduled for action in December.

(Signed) Kelly Craft
Representative of the United States to the United Nations



Annex to the letter dated 2 December 2020 from the Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Geneva Consensus Declaration on Promoting Women's Health and Strengthening the Family

We, ministers and high representatives of Governments,

Having intended to gather on the margins of the 2020 World Health Assembly in Geneva, Switzerland to review progress made and challenges to uphold the right to the highest attainable standards of health for women; to promote women's essential contribution to health, and strength of the family and of a successful and flourishing society; and to express the essential priority of protecting the right to life, committing to coordinated efforts in multilateral fora; despite our inability to meet in Geneva due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, in solidarity, we

1. *Reaffirm* "all are equal before the law,"¹ and "human rights of women are an inalienable, integral, and indivisible part of all human rights and fundamental freedoms";²

2. *Emphasize* "the equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all civil and political rights,"³ as well as economic, social, and cultural rights; and the "equal rights, opportunities and access to resources and equal sharing of responsibilities for the family by men and women and a harmonious partnership between them are critical to their well-being and that of their families"⁴; and that "women and girls must enjoy equal access to quality education, economic resources, and political participation as well as equal opportunities with men and boys for employment, leadership and decision-making at all levels;"⁵

3. *Reaffirm* the inherent "dignity and worth of the human person,"⁶ that "every human being has the inherent right to life,"⁷ and the commitment "to enable women to go safely through pregnancy and childbirth and provide couples with the best chance of having a healthy infant";⁸

4. *Emphasize* that "in no case should abortion be promoted as a method of family planning"⁹ and that "any measures or changes related to abortion within the

¹ United Nations General Assembly. (1948). "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" (Article 7). Paris.

² United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women. (1995). "Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action" (Paragraph 9). Beijing.

³ United Nations General Assembly. (1966). "International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights" (Article 3). New York.

⁴ Ibid. United Nations International Conference on Population and Development. (1994). "Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population Development" (Sections 8.25 and 63). Cairo.

⁵ United Nations General Assembly. (2015). "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" (Paragraph 20). New York.

⁶ United Nations General Assembly. (1948). "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" (Preamble). Paris.

⁷ United Nations General Assembly. (1966). "International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights" (Article 6.1). New York.

⁸ United Nations International Conference on Population and Development. (1994). "Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population Development" (Section 7.2). Cairo.

⁹ Ibid. Section 8.25.

health system can only be determined at the national or local level according to the national legislative process”;¹⁰

5. *Reaffirm* that “the child ... needs special safeguards and care ... before as well as after birth”¹¹ and “special measures of protection and assistance should be taken on behalf of all children,”¹² based on the principle of the best interest of the child;

Reaffirm that “the family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State”;¹³ that “motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance,”¹⁴ that “women play a critical role in the family”¹⁵ and women’s “contribution to the welfare of the family and to the development of society”;¹⁶

6. *Recognize* that “universal health coverage is fundamental for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals related not only to health and well-being,”¹⁷ with further recognition that “health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”¹⁸ that “the predominant focus of health-care systems on treating illness rather than maintaining optimal health also prevents a holistic approach”;¹⁹ and that there are “needs that exist at different stages in an individual’s lifespan,”²⁰ which together support optimal health across the life course, entailing the provision of the necessary information, skills, and care for achieving the best possible health outcomes and reaching full human potential; and

7. *Reaffirm* the importance of national ownership and the primary role and responsibility of governments at all levels to determine their own path towards achieving universal health coverage, in accordance with national contexts and priorities”;²¹ preserving human dignity and all the rights and freedoms set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Furthermore, we, the representatives of our sovereign nations do hereby declare in mutual friendship and respect, our commitment to work together to:

- *Ensure* the full enjoyment of all human rights and equal opportunity for women at all levels of political, economic, and public life;

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ United Nations General Assembly. (1959). “Declaration on the Rights of the Child” (Preamble). New York.

¹² United Nations General Assembly. (1966). “International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights” (Article 10[3]). New York.

¹³ United Nations General Assembly. (1948). “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” (217A [III], Article 16(3)). Paris.

¹⁴ United Nations General Assembly. (1948). “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” (217A [III], Article 25[2]). Paris.

¹⁵ United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women. (1995). “Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action” (Annex II, Paragraph 29). Beijing.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ United Nations General Assembly. (2019). “Political declaration of the high-level meeting on universal health coverage” (Paragraph 5). New York.

¹⁸ International Health Conference. (1946). “Constitution of the World Health Organization.” New York.

¹⁹ United Nations General Assembly. (2000). “Further actions and initiatives to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action” (Paragraph 11). New York.

²⁰ United Nations Economic and Social Council. (1999). “Commission for Social Development: Report on the thirty-seventh session” (Chapter 1 [Annex, Paragraph 3], in reference to Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development). New York.

²¹ United Nations General Assembly. (2019). “Political declaration of the high-level meeting on universal health coverage” (Paragraph 6). New York.

- *Improve and secure* access to health and development gains for women, including sexual and reproductive health, which must always promote optimal health, the highest attainable standard of health, without including abortion;
- Reaffirm that there is no international right to abortion, nor any international obligation on the part of States to finance or facilitate abortion, consistent with the long-standing international consensus that each nation has the sovereign right to implement programs and activities consistent with their laws and policies;
- *Build* our health system capacity and mobilize resources to implement health and development programs that address the needs of women and children in situations of vulnerability and advance universal health coverage;
- *Advance* supportive public health policies for women and girls as well as families, including building our healthcare capacity and mobilizing resources within our own countries, bilaterally, and in multilateral fora;
- *Support* the role of the family as foundational to society and as a source of health, support, and care; and
- *Engage* across the UN system to realize these universal values, recognizing that individually we are strong, but together we are stronger.

Member State Signatories

1. Kingdom of Bahrain
2. Republic of Belarus
3. Republic of Benin
4. Federative Republic of Brazil (cosponsor)
5. Burkina Faso
6. Republic of Cameroon
7. Republic of the Congo
8. Democratic Republic of the Congo
9. Republic of Djibouti
10. Arab Republic of Egypt (cosponsor)
11. Kingdom of Eswatini
12. Republic of The Gambia
13. Georgia
14. Republic of Haiti
15. Hungary (cosponsor)
16. Republic of Indonesia (cosponsor)
17. Republic of Iraq
18. Republic of Kenya
19. State of Kuwait
20. State of Libya
21. Republic of Nauru

22. Republic of Niger
 23. Sultanate of Oman
 24. Islamic Republic of Pakistan
 25. Republic of Paraguay
 26. Republic of Poland
 27. Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
 28. Republic of Senegal
 29. Republic of South Sudan
 30. Republic of Sudan
 31. Republic of Uganda (cosponsor)
 32. United Arab Emirates
 33. United States of America (cosponsor)
 34. Republic of Zambia
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