

November XX, 2018

The Honorable Mike Pompeo  
Secretary of State  
2201 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Pompeo,

As U.S. organizations that promote health and human rights in U.S. foreign policy, we write to express strong opposition to any attempts by the United States Department of State to censor U.S. diplomats, or any mission staff or partners. Any such effort would jeopardize global health while undermining decades of global consensus and progress.

Specifically, we are concerned by recent reports that senior officials are considering prohibiting the use of well-defined technical terms, such as “sexual and reproductive health,” “comprehensive sexuality education,” and other terms relating to sex, sexuality, and gender. We are further concerned by U.S. efforts to roll back international consensus on these issues. For nearly 25 years, the international community has united consistently in support of sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, as established in the 1994 Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development. In 2015, the international community re-committed to take action to improve sexual and reproductive health and realize reproductive rights globally through the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights are fundamental to gender equality, as well as women’s, girls’ and young people’s empowerment and decision-making. By banning the use of these terms and support for these vital issues, the U.S. isolates itself and sends the message that advancing an extreme political agenda matters more than the health and rights of individuals and communities around the world.

This unprecedented proposal erases critical aspects of people’s health and lives. This, and previous attempts by Administration officials to remove references to “gender equality”, “adolescents”, evidence-based programs, “gender-based violence”, and transgender people, among others, from internationally negotiated documents, State Department reports, and domestic U.S. policies, aims to severely curtail progress on policies supporting gender equality and the health and human rights of women, girls and marginalized populations, including adolescents and LGBTQIA individuals.

Lastly, this proposal—and ongoing self-censorship within various agencies and bureaus—will have detrimental impacts on longstanding U.S. global health priorities such as reducing HIV/AIDS, maternal mortality, and reproductive cancers, among others. This proposal could foster confusion and cautiousness among implementers and could further stigmatize those seeking comprehensive healthcare services.

We urge you to reverse and prevent any future guidance or policy that prohibits the free speech of diplomats, mission staff, and partners or that compromises the health and wellbeing of women, men, young people, LGBTQIA individuals, communities, and families. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,