



# EngenderHealth

for a better life

August 18, 2011

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama,

I am writing on behalf of EngenderHealth, a leading global nonprofit dedicated to improving the quality of reproductive health care for women and men in developing countries. As an organization that has worked on the ground in many conflict-affected countries, we strongly urge you to reverse a devastating U.S. policy that routinely denies critical abortion services to women and girls who are brutally raped and impregnated during armed conflict.

The U.S. government's "no abortion policy," attached to all U.S. humanitarian aid, makes no exception for rape or for situations in which a mother's life is threatened—even though these are the very circumstances that allow for legal abortion in our own country and in many countries around the world. This needless restriction endangers the lives of rape victims, exacerbates their suffering, and inevitably imposes the legacy of war upon their families, communities, and entire nations for generations to come.

Today, EngenderHealth operates in more than 20 countries to improve access to quality family planning, HIV, and maternal health care services, including comprehensive postabortion care for women and girls who have attempted unsafe methods of abortion. Every year, some 20 million unsafe abortions take place, causing almost 70,000 maternal deaths, according to the World Health Organization.

The many countries we have supported over recent decades include those ravaged by conflict, such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, Uganda, Sierra Leone, and Rwanda. In these and other countries, we have seen the tragic consequences of denying critical health care to women, both in the short and long term. Women and girls who have already survived horrific rape and wish to end an unwanted pregnancy are denied the information or treatment they need to do so. Many resort to getting an unsafe abortion or committing suicide. Others who are forced to carry an unwanted child to term face enormous risks of maternal death. Even if they survive childbirth, the unforgiveable stigma of rape in many countries condemns them to a lifetime of severe social, psychological, and physical trauma.

As the global leader in humanitarian assistance, the U.S. government must meet its obligations under international humanitarian law to provide comprehensive and nondiscriminatory medical care to women and girls in armed conflict, including their right to receive abortion information and services. The United States has already led the international community in recognizing rape as a weapon in war and as a heinous act that constitutes a war crime (UN Security Council Resolution 1820). Let us reaffirm our role as the standard bearer in the laws of war by protecting the victims of this crime and lifting the blanket abortion restrictions that deny them their rights to essential medical care.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Pamela W. Barnes". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "P".

Pamela W. Barnes  
President and CEO