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GLOBAL JUSTICE CENTER CHALLENGES THE ABORTION SPEECH CENSORSHIP IMPOSED BY THE U.S. ON ALL FOREIGN AID RECIPIENTS, AT THE UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

The Global Justice Center, in a submission to the UN Human Rights Council, challenges the censorship of abortion related speech imposed on all U.S. foreign aid. The Global Justice Center identifies the alarming effects of this censorship, including denying impregnated rape victims in conflict access to information about abortion services. “For the United States to prevent women and girls who have been gang raped and impregnated by the military in places like the Congo, Sudan, or Burma from their full range of medical treatment options, including abortion, is cruel, inhumane, and violates fundamental international laws such as the Geneva Conventions,” says Global Justice Center President Janet Benshoof. “It is not what America stands for.”

The Global Justice Center also singles out the censorship in overseas rule of law and democracy projects. For example, U.S. and foreign NGOs must exclude any discussion on criminal abortion law reform when advising governments and conducting trainings on the domestic integration of international human rights laws. This violates the guarantees of free expression in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

This censorship, originating in the 1973 Helms Amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act, has expanded over the last 37 years to cover all foreign appropriations, including U.S. State Department and USAID funds; censoring over \$49 billion in U.S. foreign aid in 2010. The Global Justice Center filing to the Human Rights Council does not address the problematic restrictions on funding abortion services or on U.S. funded population and family planning projects.

The Global Justice Center urges the Human Rights Council to find the U.S. in violation of international human rights and humanitarian law. Given the ongoing humanitarian law violations, the Global Justice Center is also seeking an Executive Order by President Obama that would immediately lift the censorship on all humanitarian aid and halt the discriminatory treatment now provided to women and girls in conflict areas.

“The Obama Administration has taken laudable steps, including lifting the Global Gag Rule in January 2009, to establish the United States as a partner in the human rights community,” states Benshoof. “But these efforts ring hollow as long as the Helms Amendment and related restrictions remain in place, censoring initiatives like the \$17 million for sexual violence victims in the Congo allocated by Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton.”

The Global Justice Center is a human rights organization developing progressive interpretations of international human rights law and strategies for its enforcement. To find out more visit www.globaljusticecenter.net.

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