

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

November 14, 2002

The Honorable Colin L. Powell
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20520-0001

Dear Secretary Powell,

It is with great shock and dismay that we write you today. We have recently learned that at a preparatory meeting for the Fifth Asia Conference on Population and Development in Bangkok, Thailand the United States publicly announced that it was unable to reaffirm its commitment to the International Conference on Population Development (ICPD) Program of Action and that this position was non-negotiable. Needless to say, this statement was met with profound shock by many country delegations.

We were further dismayed to learn that John Klink served as an advisor to the U.S. delegation. Contrary to your recommendation, the Bush Administration considered nominating Mr. Klink to head the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration, but his name was withdrawn amid outcry and controversy over his stated positions regarding population and development. For example, while at the United Nations conference in Cairo in 1994, Mr. Klink opposed the use of contraceptives to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS, (*Washington Post*, May 24, 2001). Now, it appears that despite the fact that Mr. Klink's name never even made it through the official nomination process to head PRM, he is essentially making the Administration's policy on population issues.

Further, it is our understanding that the U.S. delegation specified that all references to reproductive health rights must be bracketed (i.e., the U.S. cannot agree with the term and the fact that it refers to the notion that all people have the right to control their fertility) and that all references to sexual rights and health must be removed, despite considerable support for this language from many delegations, including: China, India, and Indonesia. The U.S. delegation insisted that all references to reproductive health services be replaced by reproductive healthcare. Instead, the U.S. promoted language that focused on the desirability of abstinence as the healthiest choice for unmarried adolescents, clearly ignoring the vast data on the efficacy of comprehensive sex education.

Mr. Secretary, the impact of these public statements is devastating and could undermine 10 years of work. As you know, the ICPD was held in Cairo in September 1994 and was the largest intergovernmental conference on population and development ever held with more than 180 states participating. The United States had a great deal of influence at this conference and played a large role in crafting the language. The Program of Action endorsed a new strategy that emphasized the linkages between population and development and stated for the first time that

people should have the means and the information to exercise their right to control their own fertility. The key to the new approach was to empower women and provide them with more choices through access to health services, education, and employment. As a result of the ICPD, countries dropped population quotas and began tackling important issues ranging from the needs of adolescents, promoting women's equality, and preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS. In effect, the ICPD conceived of reproductive health as a holistic issue and recommended a set of measurable goals and objectives to achieve it. 179 countries agreed to this new approach.

Mr. Secretary, countries around the world look to the United States for its leadership on population and development. If the United States continues to follow this new policy and actually makes efforts to rewrite the principles of population and development, with a strict reliance on abstinence-only programs, we fear that the world will take a giant leap backwards. It is likely that repressive countries will follow the U.S. in its decision and the progress that has been made will cease. Furthermore, we are concerned that funding for comprehensive family planning and education services will be severely limited thereby directly impacting the lives of women and children around the world.

Finally, we are extremely concerned that this is the latest action in a series of events where the United States is not only running away from women around the world but actively working to hamper their progress. A brief list includes: the Administration's decision to defund the United Nations Population Fund, failure to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, and the Administration's regressive positions on reproductive health at the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children (UNGASS), World Summit on Sustainable Development, and the International AIDS conference in Barcelona.

We are deeply disturbed by the public statements made by the U.S. delegation at the preparatory negotiations. We respectfully request a meeting to review the position taken by the delegation, and urge you to take whatever steps necessary to ensure that the delegation and its activities adequately reflect the will of the American people.

Thank you very much for your prompt attention to this matter, and we eagerly anticipate your reply.

Sincerely,

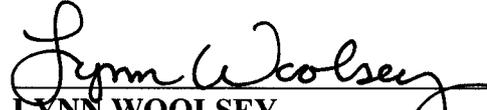

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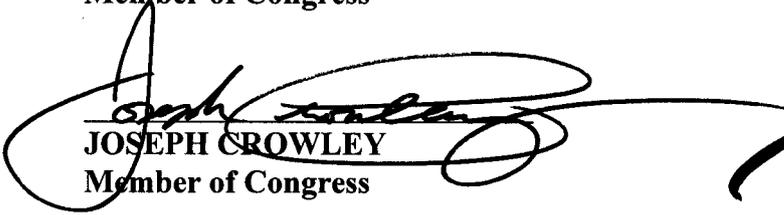

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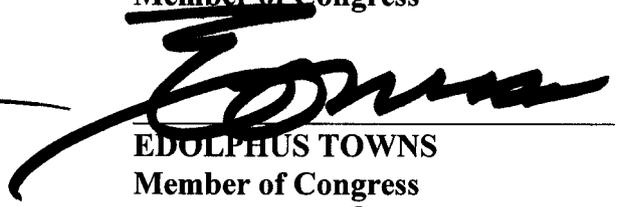

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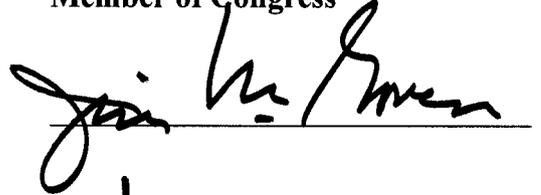

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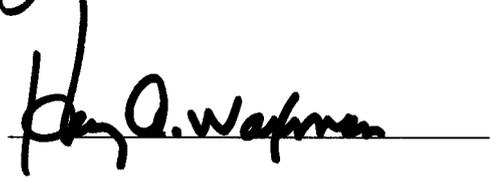

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