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## Funding Restored to Groups That Perform Abortions, Other Care

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President Obama yesterday lifted a ban on U.S. funding for international health groups that perform abortions, promote legalizing the procedure or provide counseling about terminating pregnancies.

Obama issued a memorandum rescinding the Mexico City Policy, also known as the "global gag rule," which President Ronald Reagan originally instituted in 1984, President Bill Clinton reversed in 1993 and President George W. Bush revived in 2001.

The memorandum revokes Bush's order, calling the limitations on funding "excessively broad" and adding that "they have undermined efforts to promote safe and effective voluntary family programs in foreign nations." In an accompanying statement, Obama said he would also work with Congress to restore U.S. funding support for the United Nations Population Fund "to reduce poverty, improve the health of women and children, prevent HIV/AIDS and provide family planning assistance to women in 154 countries."

Obama's decision was praised by family planning groups, women's health advocates and others for allowing the U.S. Agency for International Development to once again provide millions of dollars to programs offering medical services, birth control, HIV prevention and other care.

"For eight long years, the global gag rule has been used by the Bush administration to play politics with the lives of poor women across the world," said **Gill Greer of the International Planned Parenthood Federation in London.**

The decision marked Obama's latest break with his predecessor. The order Bush signed reviving the policy was the first of his administration and was signed on his first day in office, whereas Obama's first -- signed Thursday -- ordered the closure of the Guantanamo Bay prison in Cuba.

The decision also appeared to be another sign of Obama's attempts try to bridge even the widest political divides. Obama signed the order one day later than had been expected -- avoiding the confrontational step of doing so on the same day that thousands of abortion opponents participated in a March for Life on the Mall to protest the *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion in the United States.

Jim Wallis of the progressive evangelical group Sojourners praised Obama for not signing the order on the day of the march and instead marking the day by issuing his first presidential statement about abortion, which called on all sides to find common ground, such as working to reduce abortions.

"President Obama showed respect for both sides in the historically polarized abortion debate, and called for both a new conversation and a new common ground. I hope that this important gesture signals the beginning of a new approach and a new path toward finding some real solutions to decrease the number of abortions in this country and around the world," Wallis said.

The rescission order was signed late in the day yesterday without any reporters, news photographers or television cameras present, in marked contrast to elaborate ceremonies highlighting orders Obama signed earlier in the week.

Nevertheless, the move was condemned by members of Congress opposed to abortion and by leading antiabortion groups.

"Yesterday, President Obama issued executive orders banning the torture of terrorists but today signed an order that exports the torture of unborn children around the world," said Tony Perkins of the Family Research Council.

Abortion rights advocates are also pushing to increase funding for reproductive health programs, to cut funding for sex education programs that focus on abstinence, and to reverse a recently implemented Health and Human Services regulation that protects health-care workers who object to providing any care they consider objectionable, including abortion.

"We look forward to working with President Obama on common-sense policies such as reversing Bush's midnight HHS rule, funding comprehensive sex education to keep our teens healthy, and increasing access to affordable family planning that help prevent unintended and teen pregnancies and lead to healthy outcomes for women," said **Cecile Richards, president of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America.**

Lifting the Mexico City Policy would not permit U.S. tax dollars to be used for abortions, but it would allow funding to resume to groups that provide other services, including counseling about abortions

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