

FACTSHEET: Problems with the International Violence Against Women Act of 2014

Catholic Family and Human Rights Institute (C-FAM) is deeply concerned about women and girls throughout the world who suffer because of the egregious crimes of physical and sexual violence. That is the reason we urge policy makers to ensure that efforts to stop violence against women are not undermined by attempts to attach controversial social policies which may derail important initiatives and which may inflict even more harm to women and girls.

The *International Violence against Women Act of 2014* (I-VAWA) in its current form contains items that expand and prioritize sexual and reproductive rights programs over life-sustaining health programs, further victimizing the very people it is meant to protect.

Specifically, I-VAWA codifies controversial foreign policy initiatives implemented by the Obama Administration on gender-based violence that mandate sexual and reproductive health and rights and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) rights. These initiatives are:

- ▲ The *United States Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence Globally* (SPRG)
- ▲ The *United States National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security* (NAP)
- ▲ The establishment within the Department of State of an Office of Global Women's Issues
- ▲ The establishment within USAID of a Senior Coordinator for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment.

The permanent establishment of these offices and policies is highly problematic. The policies include phrases which are easily exploited as a “catch-all” for mandating divisive social activism, not only pushing reproductive health issues, but also radical feminism and LGBT issues onto other countries. Without clarifying otherwise, these policies may provide the State Department and USAID with license to dramatically expand and promote aggressive sexual and abortion agendas, export parochial feminist ideology, and make LGBT activism a permanent priority of US foreign policy. This will not combat violence against women internationally, and likely will do more harm to them.

Specific areas of concern addressed in this Fact Sheet:

Section 1 exposes how I-VAWA, in its current form, will divert resources to promoting abortion.

Section 2 exposes shortcomings of both I-VAWA and the family planning model in general.

Section 3 offers specific suggestions for amendments.

Section 1. How I-VAWA promotes abortion.

The policies codified in I-VAWA explicitly expand "reproductive health" programs:

- The NAP, published by the White House in 2011, orders the State Department, Centers for

Disease Control, and USAID to support women's and girls' increased access to health services; including reproductive and maternal health care in order to achieve the outcome that women and girls participate in economic recovery and increased access to health servicesⁱ.

- The NAP also explicitly states that sexual and reproductive health is a direct service for the prevention and response to sexual and gender-based violenceⁱⁱ.
- The *Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence Globally*, under "Objectives and Actions," represents a multi-sector approach that includes justice, security, and health (including sexual and reproductive health)ⁱⁱⁱ. It specifies that gender-based violence activities may be stand-alone or embedded in a larger program activity; for instance: a reproductive health services program that includes training for providers to recognize and respond to victims of domestic violence^{iv}.

Newly established offices in the State Department and USAID are given vague missions:

- ⤴ The Office of Global Women's Issues and Senior Coordinator for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment were both established under the Obama administration without legislative approval.
- ⤴ I-VAWA (Sec 101 and 102) solidifies the permanence of these offices.
- ⤴ I-VAWA does not clearly establish the objectives of these offices, providing them latitude to interpret terms like "empowerment" and "equality" to mandate whatever programs the office deems fit, including abortion-on-demand.

The Department of State prioritizes family planning, which may include abortion:

- ⤴ Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees, and Migration Anne C. Richards recently stated at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, "We in the US government could not agree more...Women's equality, empowerment, and human rights are inexorably tied to their ability to control when they bear children."
- ⤴ At the same CSIS event, Richards, along with several other US government representatives argued that the provision of contraception and other family planning services is the best tool available to advance and promote gender-equality.
- ⤴ Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stated at the G8 Foreign Ministers Meeting in Gatineau, Canada, "If we're talking about maternal health, you cannot have maternal health without reproductive health. And reproductive health includes contraception and family planning and access to legal, safe abortions."

Abortion activists exploit poorly-defined terms like "women's empowerment" and "equality" to push executive action to provide abortion overseas:

- ⤴ Abortion activists sent a letter to President Obama applauding his efforts in the NAP and SPRG, and urging him to go further and re-interpret the Helms Amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act, which prohibits US funding of abortion overseas. These groups claim that abortion in response to sexual or gender-based violence is not "family planning" and therefore should not be prohibited under Helms, and use the momentum of the NAP and SPRG to push their agenda.
- ⤴ The International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) is one of the largest global providers of abortion. IPPF makes no equivocations in its perception of women's empowerment and

equality when stating, “IPPF...calls on governments to...respect, protect and fulfill all women’s human rights, especially sexual and reproductive rights, without which the ability to exercise other rights is significantly constrained.” Furthermore, “All individuals should have the right to decide what happens to their bodies. Governments must...provide access to safe, legal abortions.” Organizations like IPPF seek to enshrine abortion, which they view as empowering, in U.S. foreign policy through any means.

Section 2. The I-VAWA focus neglects priorities and may perpetuate human rights abuses.

Emphasizing family planning often diverts attention from root causes of problems and onto simplistic “solutions” that only mask the effects of violence, not preventing or ending it:

- ⤴ Regarding child marriage, family planning advocates would have us think equality only entails telling girls they can choose when to have children. Assistant Secretary Richards stated recently that “throughout the developing world less than one third of married adolescents are using modern contraceptives.” This misplaces emphasis away from the imprisonment and selling of girls into marriage, reducing it to only a matter of curtailing adolescent pregnancy. It furthermore shifts attention from abolishing child marriage toward tolerating it under the condition that these girls have access to contraception. Child marriage, and sexual activity among children whether married or not, represents abuse, a problem that contraception does not and cannot solve.
- ⤴ I-VAWA does not alleviate the violence of sex-selective abortion and may be used to commit it. A reported 163 million girls have been killed before birth or in their infancy simply because they were girls. If the policies intended to promote gender equality shift toward reproductive health, and if abortion is condoned and funded by US foreign policy through American assistance programs, then the practice of sex-selection will be funded by the U.S. government as a consequence. This would constitute a direct contradiction to the overall mission of promoting gender-equality and reducing violence against women.

Current family-planning programs distribute contraceptives rejected for use in the United States:

- ⤴ Some contraceptive methods supported by the State Department and USAID have been banned in the United States. Administering dangerous drugs, especially without informed consent and in regions that cannot care for consequences, is an act of violence against women and should not be permissible under legislation designed to prevent gender-based violence.
- ⤴ The FDA rejected *Jadelle*, a re-branded Norplant II, for use in the United States. Yet USAID funds its use in developing countries. Norplant was withdrawn from U.S. shelves after lawsuits were filed by more than 50,000 women. Side effects include ovarian cysts, blood clots, and increased risks of cancer.
- ⤴ From 1994 through 2000, USAID provided 42,967,200 units of *Depo Provera* to the developing world. More recently USAID funded studies to scale-up delivery and distribution even funding the development of a self-inject version that would bypass healthcare workers administering the injectable. Many of the women who were given, and who continue to be given, such drugs are ill-informed of the potential health risks which include double risk of

breast cancer and increased risk of HIV transmission.

- ⤴ Global experience shows maternal mortality is reduced by improving health care during pregnancy and childbirth, and by improving health infrastructure.
- ⤴ Forty four percent of women in the developing world give birth in facilities without access to clean water. Lack of clean water increases maternal mortality rates by 50%, and women living in poor sanitation conditions are 3 times as likely to die of maternal health-related issues.
- ⤴ While the NAP acknowledges projects to improve water and sanitation conditions to provide relief for victims of sexual and gender-based violence^v, clean water is hardly ever considered a maternal-health concern. In fact, access to clean water and sanitary living conditions may be the most important factors in reducing maternal mortality and reducing the risks of exposure to violence.
- ⤴ Family planning does not address sanitation issues for women. Giving it a higher priority diverts attention and resources.

I-VAWA does not prioritize education:

- ⤴ Under Section 3:5, education is listed as a multi-sector approach to preventing and responding to violence against women and girls internationally.
- ⤴ In sub-Saharan Africa, 40.1 % of girls and 33.1 % of boys are not enrolled in secondary schools. While education is mentioned briefly, a clear approach should be outlined prioritizing the importance of education in preventing gender-based violence and delaying sexual activity.
- ⤴ Cash transfer incentive programs have been shown to increase school attendance and academic achievement. A 2009 Gates Foundation program found that a \$10 per week award to families to allow their daughters to attend school delayed onset of sexual activity by 38%, decreased the number of sexual partners by 25%, and reduced pregnancy by 40%. These results would significantly affect the incidence of sexual violence among young women and girls.

I-VAWA promotes a radical feminist ideology, which detracts from the effectiveness of anti-violence programs:

- ⤴ Sec. 2 of I-VAWA lists a series of congressional findings, expressed as facts, which rely on distorted and unsubstantiated data. The first assertion that “An estimated 1 out of every 3 women throughout the world will be beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime” is an often-repeated figure that is hardly ever given a citation due to the fact that it is unsubstantiated. The figure is a broad estimation based on a multitude of population surveys. Research into intimate partner violence is so new that very few comparable statistics exist. The “1 in 3” figure is shaky, at best.
- ⤴ This bill neglects violence perpetrated against male victims. Studies have shown that men and boys too are victims of sexual violence and noting this in the bill is fitting given the grievous nature of such abuse.
- ⤴ Section 3:3 calls for the United States “to support and build local capacity in developing countries...especially women-led organizations.” Narrowing criteria to only women-led organizations rather than on the quality and merit of organizations limits applicant pools unfairly and hinders the overall objective of helping women and girls. It may furthermore be viewed as an explicit act of discrimination, or even a deliberate attempt to funnel appropriated funds to abortion rights groups and those with women installed as figureheads.

- ⤴ Decriminalization of prostitution is often suggested as a means to combat violence against women by those promoting gender equality. Anti-trafficking organizations oppose this policy change arguing this will lead more girls into prostitution and elevate those who exploit prostitutes to the level of respectable businessmen. Moreover, such an action would inevitably increase the trafficking of vulnerable young girls, which is one of the most egregious acts of violence against women and girls committed in the world today.

The NAP and SPRG promote increased advocacy of LGBT rights, which is not only controversial, but has resulted in backlash, further victimizing persons identified as LGBT:

- ⤴ The NAP and SPRG single out LGBT persons as a group which needs protection from gender-based violence.^{vi} *All people need protection.* There is no need to single out any group. It is already evident that the State Department is using NAP and SPRG guidelines to promote LGBT activism through US foreign policy. Passing IVAWA will codify these initiatives long after the Obama administration ends.
- ⤴ Prioritizing LGBT rights abroad has led to a backlash in countries and communities who feel foreign values are being imposed on them. According to African leaders and international experts, the harsh new law in Uganda is a reaction to what leaders there call a Western imposition of a politically charged perspective of LGBT persons.

Section 3. C-FAM Recommendations for Necessary Amendments to I-VAWA

- I-VAWA must be amended to prevent advocating for abortion.
- I-VAWA must be amended to prohibit federal funding of abortion.
- I-VAWA must emphasize literacy, academic education and skills for girls and women.
- I-VAWA must exclude funding drugs not approved in the United States due to known side effects, medical care without informed consent, and programs and organizations that utilize either.
- I-VAWA should not fund advocacy efforts abroad that promote the legalization of prostitution.

i *United States' National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security*, December 2011, pg 21.

ii *ibid.* pg 22

iii *United States' Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence Globally*. August 2012. pg 14.

iv *ibid.* pg 48.

v *United States' National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security*, December 2011, pg 9-10

vi *United States' National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security*, pg 1; *United States' Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence Globally*. pgs. 7, 37, and 40.