

# C-Fam | FACTSHEET

Center for Family and Human Rights

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## Five Reasons Why the U.S. Should Defund UN Women

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To maintain the pro-life strides instituted by the Trump Administration the United States should defund the “UN Agency for Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment” (UN Women).

Since its founding, UN Women has promoted controversial social policies under the rubric of and for “sexual and reproductive rights” that do not fall within the agency’s mandate, are not the object of international consensus, and violate the laws of several UN Member States. This includes the acceptance and decriminalization of abortion, the implementation of comprehensive sexuality education programs, and the notion of prostitution as “sex-work,” among others.

Notwithstanding criticism from UN Member States,<sup>i</sup>UN Women intends to continue promoting controversial social policies. UN Women’s latest Strategic Plan (2018-2021) focuses more on “sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights” than maternal and child health or holistic health. The new plan also reaffirms that the agency will continue to work with and fund local organizations and women’s groups without any assurance it will not fund abortion advocates, including where abortion is illegal or restricted.

### **1. UN Women promotes the decriminalization of abortion.**

UN Women’s abortion advocacy is common and spans across many countries and regions. From the founding of UN Women, it was commonly understood that it would not have such a mandate.<sup>ii</sup>

Since its inaugural report on “Access to Justice” in 2011, UN Women has suggested that abortion is an international right. Specifically, the report highlighted a 2006 Colombian Constitutional Court decision that called for the Colombian Parliament to decriminalize abortion on the basis of non-binding opinions of UN treaty bodies as an example of good advocacy.<sup>iii</sup>

In 2013, UN Women’s Executive Director, Ms. Lakshmi Puri, delivered a statement that clearly showed the agency’s intention to promote abortion under the rubric of “sexual and reproductive rights.” “The lack of control that women and girls have over their own bodies and sexualities is an egregious violation of their rights,” she said.<sup>iv</sup>

In 2015, Executive Director of UN Women, Ms. Phumzile Mlambo, participated in a conference on women's empowerment in Chile and said that the "decriminalization of abortion in the three exceptions is a good start." In the same occasion, addressing the Church's teachings on abortion, she said the Church "must evolve."<sup>v</sup>Ms. Mlambo was just confirmed for another four-years term as the agency's executive director.

In 2016, UN Women's Mexican office condemned the constitutional amendment of the state of Veracruz that explicitly protected the right to life of children in the womb from the moment of conception. A UN Women press release said that law "compromises women's rights" and restricts their access to "sexual and reproductive health services."<sup>vi</sup>

In 2017, UN Women called on the Bolivian Government to extend access to abortion from eight to twelve weeks.<sup>vii</sup>

## **2. UN Women lies about the obligations of member states under international law and about their own political commitments in UN agreements.**

UN Women's mandate is exclusively normative. It does not have any direct involvement in providing vulnerable populations with services or commodities of any kind. Considering this, UN Women has a heightened responsibility to accurately and truthfully represent the obligations of states under international law and their international commitments under international political agreements. UN Women should remain uninvolved in contentious social debates. Instead, they should focus on matters on which UN member states agree consensually. But the opposite is true.

UN Women officials falsely suggest that access to abortion is an international human right. No UN treaty mentions abortion or can be read as implying abortion as a right.<sup>viii</sup>

Also, they pressure countries to change their laws banning or restricting abortion as a way to promote "reproductive rights" and "sexual rights," even though a right to abortion has never been contemplated in UN agreements.

"Sexual and reproductive health" and "reproductive rights" were only ever defined by the UN General Assembly at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development. It adopted those definitions again at the 4<sup>th</sup> World Conference on Women in Beijing the next year. UN Women is mandated to follow the outcomes of Beijing. Those definitions excluded the notion of "sexual rights," which UN Women continues to use.

UN Member States agreed in those conferences that "any measures or changes related to abortion within the health system can only be determined at the national or local level according to the national legislative process." (Beijing Platform for Action, 106 (k), ICPD, 8.25). This categorically excludes that abortion may be considered an international right under any circumstances.

UN Member States also agreed that, "in no case should abortion be promoted as a method of family planning", and that "women must be provided with post-abortion health-care and counseling" (Beijing Platform for Action, 106 (k), ICPD 8.25). They also agreed "governments should take appropriate steps to help women avoid abortion" (ICPD, 7.24). It was the intent of Nations to cast abortion in a negative light as a harm to women which must be avoided. In order to comply with its own mandate, UN Women should respect these important caveats if ever it deals with the subject of abortion. But it does the opposite.

## **3. UN Women directly and indirectly undermines U.S. Foreign Policy.**

Last March, Ms. Mlambo participated in the "She Decides" campaign, a fundraising conference organized by countries and groups that promotes abortion. The conference was aimed at "countering" and undermining

the effects of U.S. Mexico City Policy reinstated by President Donald Trump in February 2017, and now called “Protecting Life in Global Health.” The conference’s vilifying tones<sup>ix</sup> against the U.S. policy should by itself be sufficient to require that UN Agencies not attend.

In addition, Ms. Mlambo reaffirmed UN Women’s commitment to promote “sexual and reproductive rights” in collaboration with UNFPA, which the U.S. government has ceased to fund because of its collaboration with the Chinese government in designing and implementing coercive population control policies and promoting abortion.

Since at least 2013 UN Women has flirted with referring to prostitution as “sex work” and lobbying for its decriminalization. This undermines the historic priority in U.S. Foreign Policy under Republican administrations to deny foreign assistance to groups that promote the legalization of prostitution.

In 2016 UN Women convened an Expert Group Meeting whose final report included recommendations on the decriminalization of sex workers and clients in order to safeguard the “human rights of sex workers,” to recognize “sex work” itself as a right, and to grant “sex- workers” the right to organize in trade unions.<sup>x</sup>

#### **4. UN Women promotes “Comprehensive Sexuality Education.”**

Also troubling is UN Women’s promotion of “Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE)” programs to educate “young girls” on their “sexual and reproductive rights.” CSE is not about education. It is a loaded term at the United Nations, and because of what it stands for, it does not enjoy international consensus.

UN Women partners in a program<sup>xi</sup> jointly launched in 2015 with UNESCO, UNFPA and the World Bank, for the “Empowerment of Adolescent Girls and Young Women through Education.” UNFPA’s former Executive Director, Babatunde Osotimehin, explicitly mentioned the program includes “comprehensive sexuality education,”<sup>xii</sup> as confirmed by the recent implementation of the program in Nepal.<sup>xiii</sup> Last March, UN Women’s Executive Director, Ms. Lakshmi Puri, said CSE is fundamental for children, who need to be reached “as soon as possible.”<sup>xiv</sup>

CSE programs include teaching very young children about masturbation, non-heterosexual behaviors, and *non-conformative* “gender identities.”<sup>xv</sup> Moreover, these programs do not include respect for prior rights of parents, and they do not respect religious and cultural diversities among the Member States.

CSE focuses on “risk-reduction” strategies, and not on “risk avoidance.” CSE programs rule out abstinence and fidelity as impractical and unrealistic, encouraging instead the need to increase access to contraception—and abortion when it fails. Moreover, CSE teaches the moral equivalence of any kind of sexual activity between consenting teenagers or adults.

UN Women’s involvement in the promotion of CSE combines with its declared “mission” to “challenge” and “transform” social norms, but this is highly controversial.

Based on UN agreements, any sex education promoted by UN Women must take into account “the responsibilities, rights and duties of parents and legal guardians to provide, in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child, appropriate direction and guidance in the exercise by the child of the rights recognized in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.” (Beijing Platform for Action, 107, (e),)

UN policy should not be modifying or otherwise engineering societies and cultures. This is hegemonic, and it undermines the good work of the United Nations. It completely disregards the many positive elements in all cultures and societies that contributed to the formation of the UN and legitimize and sustain its current work.

## 5. UN Women promotes abortion as a humanitarian right for victims of conflict-related sexual violence.

In 2014, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon published a Guidance Note on “Reparations for Conflict-Related Sexual Violence” in collaboration with UN Women and the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR). According to the Guidance Note, “Among other legislative measures that are needed, legislation is required to provide women and girls, who become pregnant as a result of rape, with the choice of safe and legal abortion.” The note states that, “Administrative reparations programmes can also include fistula surgery, access to antiretroviral drugs, access to safe abortion services, psycho-social support and other related measures.”<sup>xvi</sup>

International humanitarian law, which regulates the conduct of war, calls for the protection of women from rape and assault during conflict. However, the notion that reparation for victims of rape and assault should include abortion to the point of urging nations to change their laws to accommodate this is highly controversial and legally untenable.<sup>xvii</sup>

This is nothing short of an attempt to subvert international humanitarian law to promote a narrow social agenda. It conflicts with many national laws, and it would overlay political controversy on top of already unstable crisis situations. It would engender distrust of humanitarian actors, potentially disrupting their vital work. Instead of protecting humanitarian aid workers, this would place them in the crosshairs of social debates. Moreover, it further stigmatizes children born of wartime rape.

<sup>i</sup> Member States React to UN Women Abortion Advocacy, Marianna Orlandi, July 5, 2017, available at: [https://c-fam.org/turtle\\_bay/member-states-react-un-women-abortion-advocacy/](https://c-fam.org/turtle_bay/member-states-react-un-women-abortion-advocacy/). See also, UN Women Ramps Up Abortion Advocacy, Stefano Gennarini, June 22, 2017, available at: [https://c-fam.org/friday\\_fax/un-women-ramps-abortion-advocacy/](https://c-fam.org/friday_fax/un-women-ramps-abortion-advocacy/).

<sup>ii</sup> The creation of this super-agency in 2008 is largely attributed to the Global Campaign for Gender Equality (GEAR), a coalition of abortion proponents. Its first Under Secretary General, Michelle Bachelet, is a renowned abortion activist who has almost accomplished decriminalizing abortion in Chile. See: UN Creates What May Become a Billion Dollar Agency for Radical Feminism, C-Fam, July 8, 2010, available at: [https://c-fam.org/friday\\_fax/un-creates-what-may-become-a-billion-dollar-agency-for-radical-feminism/](https://c-fam.org/friday_fax/un-creates-what-may-become-a-billion-dollar-agency-for-radical-feminism/).

<sup>iii</sup> “Progress of the World’s Women: In Pursuit of Justice,” 2011, available at: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2011/7/progress-of-the-world-s-women-in-pursuit-of-justice>.

<sup>iv</sup> Opening remarks by Lakshmi Puri at the 2013 EuroNGOs conference on “Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in the Post-2015 Agenda,” October 24, 2013, Berlin, available at: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2013/10/lakshmi-puri-speech-on-sexual-and-reproductive-health-rights>.<sup>v</sup> “Directora ONU Mujeres manifestó que el aborto “es un derecho” de la mujer,” February 26, 2015, CNN Chile, available at: <http://www.cnnchile.com/noticia/2015/02/26/directora-onu-mujeres-manifesto-que-el-aborto-es-un-derecho-de-la-mujer>.

<sup>vi</sup> “ONU-MUJERES, ONU-DH y UNFPA rechazan reforma regresiva para los derechos de las mujeres en Veracruz,” July 29, 2016, available at: [http://www.unfpa.org.mx/noticias/20160729\\_ComPrensa\\_Veracruz\\_ONUMuj\\_UNFPA\\_ONUDH.pdf](http://www.unfpa.org.mx/noticias/20160729_ComPrensa_Veracruz_ONUMuj_UNFPA_ONUDH.pdf).

<sup>vii</sup> “ONU Mujeres apoya la regulación del aborto en Bolivia,” April 3, 2017, El Dia, available at: [https://www.eldia.com.bo/index.php?c=Portada&articulo=ONU-Mujeres-apoya-la-regulacion-del-aborto-en-Bolivia&cat=1&pla=3&id\\_articulo=223554](https://www.eldia.com.bo/index.php?c=Portada&articulo=ONU-Mujeres-apoya-la-regulacion-del-aborto-en-Bolivia&cat=1&pla=3&id_articulo=223554).

<sup>viii</sup> For a comprehensive analysis of the status of international law on abortion, excluding it can be considered an international right, see the expert document, “The San Jose’ Articles”, available at: <http://sanjosearticles.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/SJA.pdf>.

<sup>ix</sup> UN Staff, EU Politicians, Abortion Groups Join Forces to Vilify U.S. Pro-life Stance, Marianna Orlandi, March 9, 2017, available at: [https://c-fam.org/friday\\_fax/un-staff-eu-politicians-abortion-groups-join-forces-vilify-u-s-pro-life-stance/](https://c-fam.org/friday_fax/un-staff-eu-politicians-abortion-groups-join-forces-vilify-u-s-pro-life-stance/).

<sup>x</sup> “Report of the Expert Group Meeting on the CSW 61 Priority Theme: Women’s Economic Empowerment in the Changing World of Work,” UN-Women, Geneva, September, 2016, available at: <http://www.nswp.org/sites/nswp.org/files/EGM%20Report%2C%20UN%20Women%20-%202016.pdf>.

<sup>xi</sup> See, Three UN agencies join forces to boost education of adolescent girls and young women, available at: <http://en.unesco.org/news/three-agencies-join-forces-boost-education-adolescent-girls-and-young-women><sup>xii</sup> See: Closing the gender gap in

education, Press Release, March 10, 2015, available at: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2015/3/press-release-closing-gender-gap-in-education>.

<sup>xiii</sup> See: For empowerment of adolescent girls and young women in Nepal, April 2016, available at: <http://nepal.unfpa.org/en/news/empowerment-adolescent-girls-and-young-women-nepal>.

<sup>xiv</sup> See, El sueño de Lakshmi Puri, March 7, 2017, available at: <http://lac.unwomen.org/en/noticias-y-eventos/articulos/2017/03/el-sueno-lakshmi-puri>

<sup>xv</sup> See, “Standards for Sexuality Education in Europe,” WHO Regional Office for Europe and BZgA, 2010 (in particular at page 39, “sexuality and rights”), available at: [http://www.bzga-whocc.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/WHO\\_BZgA\\_Standards\\_English.pdf](http://www.bzga-whocc.de/fileadmin/user_upload/WHO_BZgA_Standards_English.pdf)

<sup>xvi</sup> Guidance Note of the Secretary General, Reparations for Conflict-Related Sexual Violence” United Nations. June 2014, available at: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/docs/2014/6/reparations-for-conflict-related-sexual-violence>

<sup>xvii</sup> Yoshihara, Susan, Abortion and the Laws of War: Subverting Humanitarianism by Executive Edict, 9 U. St. Thomas J.L. & Pub. Pol’y 1 (2014).



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