

Rt Hon Hilary Benn MP
Secretary of State for International Development
DFID
1 Palace Street,
London,
SW1E 5HE

19th April 2007

Cc: Ruth Kelly MP, Minister for Women
Meg Munn MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Women and Equality

Dear Hilary Benn MP,

We are writing to express our concern about the direction of World Bank policy on sexual and reproductive health and rights.

It is widely accepted that Juan Jose Daboub, a Managing Director of the World Bank, removed a key indicator on contraceptive prevalence from the Madagascar Country Assistance Strategy. We are concerned that this action was politically motivated on Daboub's part and that it goes against the key principle that Country Assistance Strategies must be owned by the countries themselves. Moreover, given that this action contradicts the World Bank's own policy in this area, we would question what this incident says about the Bank's internal coherence on this and other vital areas of policy.

We were pleased that in the Lords yesterday, Baroness Amos was able to assure the House that the indicator in the Madagascar Strategy has been reinstated. However, we remain concerned about the World Bank's ongoing policy around sexual and reproductive health and rights, particularly with regard to the Health, Nutrition and Population strategy, due to be discussed by the World Bank Board on 24 April. It is essential that this strategy fully defines the Bank's role in supporting women's access to basic family planning and other sexual and reproductive health services, including sex education and information, contraception and safe abortion.

As is recognised in DFID's recent Gender Equality Action Plan, 'the ability of women to make free and informed choices regarding their sexual and reproductive lives underpins their ability to control all other areas of their lives'. DFID has shown leadership on the issue of sexual and reproductive health and rights and in DFID's position paper (2004) on the issue, your foreword includes a commitment to 'support country governments and partners to uphold everyone's right to sexual and reproductive health'.

We are therefore writing to you, as the UK Government's Executive Board member of the Bank, to ask for your full assurance that you will uphold the UK government's commitments to all family planning, contraception, and sexual and reproductive health and rights work.

We would be grateful for an update on progress on this matter.

Yours sincerely,

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GAD Network members 2006/2007

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Minority Rights Group International
NAWO (National Alliance of Women's Organisations)
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