

May 24, 2020

The Honorable  
António Guterres  
The United Nations Secretary-General  
United Nations Headquarters  
New York, NY 10017

Dear Mr. Secretary General,

We write on behalf of Global Doctors for Choice (GDC), an international doctors' network active in many countries around the world. GDC is committed to the defense of human rights and to the provision of high-quality medical care grounded in science. Through advocacy for evidence-based policy and medical research, we strive to protect and expand access to comprehensive reproductive health care for women and girls.

We hold the United Nations' dedication to advancing women's sexual and reproductive rights across the globe in the highest regard. In times of crisis the United Nations has repeatedly stepped in to support the human rights of all, including those who are most vulnerable and in need. By declaring women's sexual and reproductive health as an essential health service during this COVID-19 pandemic, the UN's Global Humanitarian Response Plan (Global HRP) continues this important humanitarian legacy.

Recently USAID published a letter requesting that the UN refrain from including references to sexual and reproductive health in the Global HRP. USAID maintains that sexual and reproductive healthcare is not an essential service. We know that the reproductive health and rights of women are foundational to their overall health and wellbeing; it is impossible to have one without the other.

Furthermore, the general crisis relief services being offered in response to the COVID-19 pandemic seek to safeguard the health and well-being of the whole population during times of social isolation, shortages of essential goods and services, and unprecedented uncertainty. To exclude sexual and reproductive healthcare from the UN's list of essential health services is to exclude women from receiving the same level of crisis support afforded to men. The UN has never stood for this kind of discrimination against women, and now is not the time to start.

This crisis has imperiled the health of all and has produced widespread instability. In these difficult times, women deserve to feel secure in the knowledge that their basic health needs can be met. Women lacking access to reproductive and sexual healthcare face a level of uncertainty absolutely compounded by this crisis. With food shortages and widespread financial insecurity, women now more than ever need to know that they can preserve their reproductive health and have the ability to prevent and terminate unwanted pregnancies.

The United Nations has an unparalleled ability to shape COVID-19 crisis responses across the globe. We staunchly support its decision to stand by women and safeguard “sexual and reproductive health” as an explicitly stated essential health service in the Global HRP.

On behalf of the Board of Managers of Global Doctors for Choice,



Wendy Chavkin, MD, MPH  
New York, USA



Rodica Comendant, MD, PhD  
Chişinău, Moldova



Chris Fofie, MD, MPH  
Accra, Ghana



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G. Ortíz', written in a cursive style.

Guillermo Ortíz, MD, MHA  
North Carolina, USA

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Sepúlveda', written in a cursive style.

Lilian Sepúlveda, JD  
Executive Director, Global Doctors for Choice