

Progress Report

Women's Refugee Commission's Priority Recommendations to the Biden Administration

January 28, 2021

With record levels of people displaced by conflict, climate change, and other drivers of displacement, the majority of whom are women and children, the Women's Refugee Commission (WRC) crafted a list of priority recommendations for the Biden administration to take action on within the first 100 days.

Based on our work with those most at risk of violence and exploitation, we know it is vital for the Biden administration to move quickly to restore global US leadership and reset US priorities globally and at home.

President Joe Biden today signed an executive order that rescinds the Mexico City Policy, also known as "The Global Gag Rule." The Global Gag Rule was first implemented in 1984 by President Ronald Reagan and has been enacted by every Republican administration since.

The Global Gag Rule prohibits US foreign aid to any non-US organization that provides abortion services, refers patients to services, or even discusses abortion. The Trump administration expanded the policy to apply it to all global health funding, including that focused on HIV/AIDS, maternal and child survival, malaria, and more.

Today's action by President Biden is an important first step in advancing the sexual and reproductive health of displaced women and youth around the world. But, it must be just that—a first step. WRC urges the Biden administration to work with Congress to rescind the Hyde and Helms amendments—which also place restrictions on access to safe abortion services—and to restore funding to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

Also today, members of the US House and Senate will introduce the Global Health Empowerment and Rights (HER) Act, to permanently repeal the Global Gag Rule. The bill has been endorsed by more than 130 organizations, including WRC.

See below for a progress update on WRC's top priorities for the Biden administration:

Propose strong increased funding in the President's Budget Request for humanitarian assistance that is rights based; addresses the needs of those most at risk, particularly women and girls; promotes gender equality; and supports self-reliance goals. Include needed resources for a revived and robust US Refugee Admissions Program.

Renew the US commitment to gender equality in its humanitarian, development, and peace and security work. Using USAID's 2012 Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy as the starting point, develop an updated policy that builds on progress and learning to date, emphasizes the importance of sexual and reproductive health care, and promotes the full participation of the most marginalized, including adolescent girls, LGBTQI persons, and women and girls with disabilities. Also review, update, and resource the US Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security and agency implementation plans to ensure a more detailed framework with strong accountability mechanisms.

Take action to ensure access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services, including safe abortion care.

- ✓ This includes rescinding the Mexico City Policy (also known as the Global Gag Rule)

and working with Congress to repeal the Helms and Hyde amendments and repeal the Kemp-Kasten amendment and replace it with language consistent with the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD).

Expand efforts to address gender-based violence in humanitarian settings. Immediately affirm US membership in and leadership support for the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies.

Re-establish US leadership on global humanitarian and human rights policy and practice by joining the United Nations Global Compact for Migration, affirming full support for the Global Compact on Refugees, and strengthening US engagement on effective implementation of both Compacts. Re-engage with the UN Human Rights Council and strengthen advocacy on the rights of crisis-affected people, including women human rights defenders.

(In progress) Restore funding for UNFPA.

- ✓ Restart US participation in the World Health Organization (WHO), whose role in humanitarian response in the time of COVID-19 is more critical than ever.

Also restore funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), which provides assistance and protection for more than 5 million Palestinian refugees.

- ✓ Rejoin the Paris Agreement to help prevent and mitigate climate-related disasters and displacement.

Restore the rights and respect the dignity of displaced people in search of protection. Reverse policies that have closed the border to asylum seekers and unaccompanied children, including:

(In progress) Ending the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP, also known as “Remain in Mexico”);

Ending the use of Asylum Country Agreements (ACAs) with Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras; rescinding the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) order barring entry to asylum seekers; and immediately resuming the processing of asylum seekers at the border.

(In progress) Repeal all iterations of the Muslim, African, and asylum travel bans.

Ensure that foreign policy addresses root causes of migration and supports access to protection (including asylum), and is not focused on deterrence.

Immediately begin to restore the integrity of the asylum system. Restore eligibility for asylum for survivors of domestic violence, victims and survivors of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), gang violence, and members of the LGBTQI community. Withdraw or reverse decisions by the Attorney General and the Board of Immigration Appeals that narrowed the refugee definition and due process in contradiction with human rights norms.

Phase out the use of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention. Apply a presumption of release and invest in appropriate community-based case management programs instead of immigration detention. Immediately end family detention. Implement meaningful oversight and accountability mechanisms over DHS detention and custody policies.

Stop separating families at the border and in the interior. Immigration policies and practices must respect family unity. Families should neither be separated nor detained together.

(In progress) End the use of expedited processing and other measures that inhibit due process. Immediately reverse the expansion of “expedited removal” and ensure that all those in immigration proceedings have a fair day in court. Protect sensitive locations from enforcement actions.

The Women’s Refugee Commission looks forward to working with the Biden administration and the Congress to repair the devastating impacts of the previous administration’s actions, and to proactively advance the rights and protections of displaced persons around the world.