Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 5, 2006

The Honorable Jim Kolbe
Chairman
Foreign Operations, Export Financing and
Related Programs Appropriations
Subcommittee
2362 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Nita M. Lowey
Ranking Member
Foreign Operations, Export Financing and
Related Programs Appropriations
Subcommittee
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Kolbe and Ranking Member Lowey:

We are writing to urge you to increase funding for international family planning assistance in the Fiscal Year 2007 Foreign Operations Appropriations Act. These valuable programs have been consistently under funded. The President's FY2007 budget requests just $357 million, an 18 percent reduction from the FY2006 level. Inadequately funding international family planning programs will have grave consequences for the health and well-being of women across the globe for generations.

More than 500,000 women die from pregnancy or childbirth each year. Maternal deaths most frequently occur in the poorest countries in the world due to limited services to promote safe motherhood and a lack of basic health infrastructures. Furthermore, almost 50 percent of infant deaths annually are a result of poor maternal health and inadequate delivery care.

Reproductive health and family planning are also critical to achieving sustainable development. More than 95 percent of future population growth will take place in the poorest countries of the world, outpacing economic development and environmental protections. Such an increase will place enormous stress on natural resources such as water, agricultural lands, fisheries and wildlife habitat.

In response to a growing global health crisis, U.S. bilateral international family planning assistance programs now operate in more than 50 countries in the developing world. Each year international programs like these help prevent 60 million unplanned births, 105 million abortions, 22 million miscarriages and nearly 3 million infant deaths. At the same time, the world's population is increasing, leaving countries with fewer resources to meet growing demands for family planning services. This includes program activities that promote safe motherhood initiatives, combat sexual and gender-based violence, and prevent, diagnose and treat HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections to reduce the risk of mother to child transmission.

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We firmly support strengthening international family planning programs, particularly those promoting maternal and child health, stronger communities, a healthier environment, and sustainable economic growth. Adequately investing in family planning will prevent predictable maternal and child health problems across the globe, and save billions in taxpayers' dollars in the future. Therefore, we strongly urge you to substantially increase international family planning assistance, or at very least maintain the current level of funding for international family planning in the FY 2007 Foreign Operations Appropriations bill.

We appreciate your attention to this request, and hope we can count on your support.

Sincerely,

Louise M. Slaughter

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