

# INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR WOMEN'S RIGHT TO SAFE ABORTION

## Campaign Statement, 21 May 2020

### **We wish to express our strong support for the World Health Organization, other UN agencies and everyone working in tandem with them to end the Covid-19 pandemic**

The World Health Organization (WHO), other United Nations (UN) agencies, and the great majority of countries, public health and human rights experts, humanitarian and civil society organizations, have been working together throughout 2020 to share knowledge; understand, prevent and mitigate the consequences of Covid-19; and promote global public health.

We wish to express our strong support for all of them, and especially for WHO, who carry the greatest burden of trying to promote global public health policies and services that are relevant, accessible, affordable, available, feasible and effective for more than 7 billion people with grossly unequal access to economic, educational, healthcare, food and natural resources.

In this light, we condemn the vicious and unjustified attacks on WHO and the United Nations by the President of the United States<sup>1</sup> and his unwarranted threats and demands to do his bidding in three critical areas in the global Covid-19 response:

1. Demonstrate independence from China — while acceding to everything the US demands instead.
2. Reject long-fought-for proposals, agreed for the first time in history,<sup>2,3</sup> for countries to work together to develop diagnostics and treatment for Covid-19 which all countries can access and benefit from equitably — and instead allow the US to benefit the most.
3. Reject sexual and reproductive health care, including safe abortion, as essential health services both before, during and after this pandemic. This in defiance of a highly supportive statement by 59 countries on protecting sexual and reproductive health and rights and promoting gender-responsiveness in the Covid-19 crisis.<sup>4</sup> This because the US President, unlike the majority of his fellow citizens, does not believe women have the right to safe abortion, and does not even appear to know what is included under 'sexual and reproductive health', such as safe pregnancy and childbirth.

The US government has withdrawn its funding and membership (temporarily or permanently) from the UN as a whole, and from UNESCO, UNFPA, and the UN Human Rights Council since 1988,<sup>5</sup> and is now threatening to leave WHO. This is an unfortunate record.

However, the independence of the United Nations and all its agencies is paramount if they are to fulfil their global responsibilities. We urge them to stand proud, reject these demands and continue to work towards improving global public health and human rights, including support for sexual & reproductive healthcare, and access to safe abortion, as essential public health services, leaving no one behind.

### For further information, contact:

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<sup>1</sup> [TO: Director-General Dr Tedros, WHO](#) ; [TO: Secretary-General Guterres, UN](#) ; [TO: World Health Assembly](#)

<sup>2</sup> Un General Assembly. International cooperation to ensure global access to medicines, vaccines and medical equipment to face COVID-19. Draft resolution. [UN General Assembly Resolution A/74/L.56](#), 15 April 2020.

<sup>3</sup> COVID-19: time to plan for prompt universal access to diagnostics and treatments. Re a statement by the G20. [The Lancet](#), by Luca Li Bassi, Lenias Hwenda, 16 April 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Protecting sexual and reproductive health and rights and promoting gender-responsiveness in the COVID-19 crisis. [Joint press statement](#) facilitated by the South African and Swedish ambassadors to the United Nations, 6 May 2020.

<sup>5</sup> A short history of the US rejection of many UN agencies, not just WHO. [Press briefing](#), International Campaign for Women's Right to Safe Abortion, 16 April 2020.