

BACKGROUND

Tuesday, May 20, 2003

Recent changes to HIV funding in the US (HR 1298)

The US Senate approved a new international HIV/AIDS funding bill for approximately \$15 billion on Thursday May 15, 2003 (Senate Resolution HR 1298, United States Leadership Against HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria Act of 2003). The Senate Bill is almost identical to its predecessor in the US House of Representatives and passed through the Senate unusually quickly, preventing debate about the content of the initiative that will triple HIV funding from the US to projects worldwide.

HR 1298 contains much that is counter productive to effective HIV/AIDS prevention programs worldwide. For example, 33 percent of all prevention funding must go to abstinence programs, and it includes a 'conscience clause' that ensures that religious groups have access to funding even if they oppose condom distribution. It is important to note the regional focus of this Bill when discussing its possible long term effects on sex work projects. It specifically targets 12 nations in sub-Saharan Africa and along with Haiti and Guyana.

Content relevant to sex work projects

The Bill specifically limits funding by to sex work projects with the following:

No funds made available to carry out this Act, or any amendment made by this Act, may be used to promote or advocate the legalization or practice of prostitution or sex trafficking. (section (e), p. 62)

And.

No funds made available to carry out this Act, or any amendment made by this Act, may be used to provide assistance to any group or organization that does not have a policy explicitly opposing prostitution and sex trafficking. (section (f), p. 62)

It is important to note that it is not entirely clear how this statement will be interpreted once the Bill is signed and then enacted as policy. However, it is clear that the intent of this statement is to promote the US policy to eradicate prostitution and the sex trade. For example, the Bill states, "Prostitution and other sexual victimization are degrading to women and children and it should be the policy of the United States to eradicate such practices" (Findings, Section 23, p. 14). This policy stance is consistent with other priorities in the legislation to promote 'abstinence from sexual activity and substance abuse, encourage monogamy and faithfulness' (paragraph 4, p.20)

Predicted changes to funding for sex work projects

This new legislation does not necessarily mean that all organizations currently receiving US funding, for example, through USAID, will have to make substantial changes to the ways in which they operate. However, it is highly likely that future contracts with US government funding sources will include a statement that the funded organization

opposes the practices of prostitution and sex trafficking because of the psychological and physical risks they pose for women.

The extent to which such statements in grant agreements would be monitored in practice would be developed in policy over time and can be limited by further US-based activism.

Other steps sex work projects can take:

- Diversify funding sources, thus reducing agencies overall reliance on US funding.
- Educate funders and other agencies about the importance of continued support for sex work projects.
- Disseminate information about evaluation and effectiveness of projects.
- Keep the Network of Sex Work Projects informed of any information your agency receives in regards to these funding changes. We are building a data base about the effects of the policy to use for future lobbying purposes. If we don't hear from you, we won't know that you have been effected.