



Brian Dixon

# Enough is Enough: Why *Now* is the Time to Act

by Brian Dixon, Director of Government Relations

From his first days in the White House, President Bush has ignored the population connection and has made clear that family planning has no place in his vision of the world.

His imposition of the Global Gag Rule—on just his first day in office\*—has cut off the provision of contraceptives to women in Africa and Asia. When he blocked funding for the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), millions more women throughout the world were denied access to critical reproductive health care services and voluntary family planning. His latest attack on family planning around the world occurred just before the holidays at the 5th Asian Population Summit. At that international meeting, the United States stood alone in demanding that a groundbreaking 1994 agreement on population be significantly weakened.

While demanding that references to “reproductive health services” and to “consistent condom use” be eliminated, the White House insisted that “abstinence” be the foundation of all family planning and disease prevention strategies throughout the world. In fact, one member of the White House appointed U.S. delegation spoke from the floor of the conference about her own successful use of “natural family planning,” bringing embarrassed giggles from around the room.

At meetings like this one, at which nearly everything is based on achieving consensus, votes are almost never taken. But in this instance, the Bush administration refused to agree with the obvious consensus and forced votes. In a rare rebuke, the Bush administration lost the two votes on its efforts to weaken the agreement by margins of 32-1 and 33-1. They had moved too far right on women’s issues even for the mullahs of Iran to support.

Foreign leaders, who every day see how population connects to the problems they face, stood up and blocked the Bush effort to weaken family planning policies in their countries, and American leaders can do the same thing

here. Congress can and must step up and act to stop the Bush assault and reverse the recent losses. And they can do it in the same way, by voting against the administration’s backward proposals.

That’s why we are beginning a national effort to persuade members of Congress to take the critical first steps. They will act if their constituents demand it, and if they are convinced that there is support at home. Nothing makes that support more obvious than face-to-face meetings. That’s why we’re launching our Campaign to Save Family Planning, to put Population Connection supporters and members of congress together, in their communities, to talk about the need for family planning around the world.

We want representatives to do three things:

1. To repeal the appalling Global Gag Rule that punishes family planning providers for actions that are protected here in the United States.
2. To restore UNFPA funding and to eliminate restrictions on that funding.
3. To finally live up to the promises that our country made in 1994, to increase our financial support of family planning programs.

We know that Americans overwhelmingly support family planning programs. We plan to make sure that members of congress know it, too.

For three decades, population assistance has enjoyed bipartisan support in the Capitol. It has been one of the most successful international aid programs ever conceived. As a result of American help, more than 50 million women in some of the world’s poorest countries have been able to use contraceptives. Maternal death rates have fallen, child survival rates have increased and population growth has slowed. More children go to school, more women are gaining educational and economic opportunity and becoming full citizens in their countries.

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\* The president was inaugurated on a weekend, this action was taken on his first day of business in office.

But the problems are far from solved. More than half a million women die every year from preventable pregnancy related causes. Many parts of the world still face desperate population pressures that threaten their ability to feed, house, educate and care for their people. The Bush agenda, if allowed to succeed, will deny people the ability to make their own choices about their futures: how many children to have, when to have them, and the most basic question of how they will live. It will reverse the gains made in women's and children's health. It will undermine three decades of work to reduce

population growth rates in the most vulnerable parts of the world.

This is why now is the time Congress must act. Population is connected to every problem the world faces today: political instability, human rights violations, environmental degradation, hunger, poverty. But for the past two years, our government has ignored the population connection. With your help, our plan is to ensure that they begin to pay attention to that connection and to the need to address it today.

## Regardless of your time or commitment level, Population Connection has a way for you to get involved!

### Interested in making an impact, but just too busy?

Join our Email Action Network! The quickest, easiest way to make an impact and have your voice heard on international family planning and population issues. You can help change the world with the click of a mouse.

Sign up to receive Action Alerts, describing urgent issues at hand and sample letters addressed directly to targeted policymakers. Simply personalize the letter and reply. Your correspondence will be faxed automatically to the policymaker.

### Knowledgeable and dedicated to the issue?

Become a member of the District Activist Network! DAN, our citizen lobby program, makes you a legislative insider with the latest info on what's hot in Congress and the states. Our DAN members communicate and meet directly with state and U.S. legislators as the official local voices of Population Connection.

Becoming a District Activist is a commitment to being a voice in your legislative district for international family planning and population issues through making phone calls, writing letters to the editor and arranging face-to-face meetings with legislators.

### Looking for a way to get others on your campus motivated?

Join our Campus Outreach Program! The Campus Outreach Program is an excellent way to for undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, and student activities staff to keep up-to-date on population activities.

We provide the tools, including our Campus Activist Handbook, email newsletters, and our website. We also offer travel and lodging scholarships for student participants of Capitol Hill Days (see page 14).

### Impassioned enough to lobby your legislator in Washington, DC?

Attend Capitol Hill Days 2003! For seven years, Population Connection in collaboration with the National Wildlife Federation and Sierra Club, has encouraged activists to come to Washington, DC to lobby their representatives on Capitol Hill.

Over the course of four days in the spring, activists receive information on legislation currently before Congress. Activists receive valuable training on how to then effectively lobby for population issues while meeting face to face with their representatives. Capitol Hill Days 2003 is March 28-April 1 (see page 14 for more information).

For more information on getting active in any of these programs call us at 1-800-767-1956, or online at [www.popconnect.org](http://www.popconnect.org)