REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS

At the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development, 179 nations, including the United States, adopted the Programme of Action that defined reproductive rights as internationally recognized human rights. The following year in 1995, this standard was reiterated in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Since then, international governing bodies, governments and civil society have looked to these standards in their efforts to advance reproductive rights for women and girls.

THE HUMAN RIGHTS REPORTS

Every year, the U.S. State Department releases the Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, often called the Human Rights Reports. These reports, congressionally mandated under the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 and the Trade Act of 1974, provide the current status of human rights in United Nations member states and countries receiving U.S. foreign assistance.

The Human Rights Reports are a primary resource for tracking violations of human rights. They are used by governments and civil society to drive evidence-based programming, hold rights violators accountable and aid in asylum cases. These critical reports should be unbiased, objective findings of facts and not be influenced by the political agenda of the current administration.

REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS STRIPPED FROM THE 2017 REPORTS

The Human Rights Reports previously covered the main barriers to health and prosperity for women and girls, including gender-based violence and, since 2009, a lack of sexual and reproductive health access, under Section 6: Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons.

However, in the 2017 Human Rights Reports, the Trump administration changed the name of the subsection “Reproductive Rights” to “Coercion in Population Control.” The reports provided a shallow analysis of each country’s current state of reproductive rights, focused on coercive abortion and forced sterilization—the only topics the State Department is required to report on under current law. All of the other data collected on reproductive health, including current rates of maternal mortality and other critical issues, was deleted—erasing the challenges facing women and girls and leaving advocates around the world without vital accountability information. For example, the 2016 reports provided in-depth analysis of government-created barriers to contraceptives in the Philippines chapter. Yet the 2017 report chapter stated that there were no “coercive population control methods,” leaving civil society without the information they need to continue increasing access to family planning in the Philippines.1

COSPONSOR THE REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

We encourage you to stand up for the health and rights of women, girls and their communities by cosponsoring the Reproductive Rights are Human Rights Act to make comprehensive annual reporting on reproductive rights mandatory.

This bill would amend the Foreign Assistance Act to:

1. Include specific reporting requirements on the status of reproductive rights; and

2. Require the State Department to fully consult with local and U.S. civil society organizations specializing in women and girls’ rights when preparing each report.

To be added as a cosponsor of the Reproductive Rights are Human Rights Act, please contact the staff in the offices of Representative Katherine Clark and Senator Bob Menendez.