



## Weak Tea—Pompeo Uses Nonexistent Partnership with Chinese Government Ministry as Rationale for Cutting off UNFPA

After business hours on Friday night, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) was informed by the State Department in a terse, one-line message that Secretary Pompeo's determination that UNFPA was in violation of the Kemp-Kasten amendment had been sent to members of Congress on the relevant congressional committees that morning. The amendment prohibits funding to an organization that “supports or participates in the management of a program of coercive abortion or involuntary sterilization.” The State Department is thereby withholding all U.S. funds from UNFPA for its vital work in advancing reproductive health care globally for the third year in a row. Although the text of the formal determination has not been made public, it undoubtedly uses the same illusory relationship between UNFPA and the Chinese government’s health ministry that the Trump-Pence administration has employed twice before to justify its UNFPA funding cut-off.

Secretary Pompeo’s decision to invoke [the Kemp-Kasten amendment](#) to withhold the \$32.5 million voluntary contribution that Congress appropriated for UNFPA in the fiscal year (FY) 2019 [omnibus spending bill](#) was a foregone conclusion. In addition to requesting no funds for UNFPA in its fiscal year FY 2020 budget proposal in February, the Trump-Pence administration had further telegraphed its intentions by stating in the accompanying budget documents that it was intending to use funds withheld from UNFPA to bolster bilateral family planning and reproductive health programs of the U.S. Agency for International Development in FY 2020.

In a brief, diplomatically worded [statement](#) dated today, UNFPA “notes with regret” the American government’s decision to withhold its funding and states that it “has not yet seen the evidence to justify the serious claims made against its work.” And whether UNFPA—or the public—will ever see such “evidence” of their direct or indirect involvement in coercive birth control practices is very much in doubt given past history. [Last year’s determination](#) was considered classified, albeit at the lowest level, which prevented UNFPA from even seeing the allegations being made against the work it was supporting in China, making clear that the determination was more about perpetuating punishment than seeking redemption for UNFPA.

It is all but guaranteed that the rationale for cutting off UNFPA remains guilt by association. As stated in the administration’s first determination (FY 2017), a [leaked copy](#) of which was published by BuzzFeed, UNFPA’s alleged crime is that it “continues to partner with the [National Health and Family Planning Commission (NHFPC)] on family planning.” The NHFPC was renamed the National Health Commission (NHC) in March 2018—removing the phrase “family planning” from the ministerial structure—at the same time the Chinese government continued to move to relax enforcement of its infamous “one-child”

policy. The NHC is charged with implementation of government law and policy and furnishing health services besides family planning to the Chinese citizenry. It is akin to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) or other countries' ministries of health.

Other U.N. agencies, who shall remain nameless, "partner" with NHC on other health programs, but have emerged unscathed in this and past determinations. Even U.S. government departments and agencies like HHS, the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), the Food and Drug Administration and the National Institutes of Health have "[longstanding partnerships with China](#) and India on food and drug regulation and safety, infectious disease surveillance and detection, and biomedical research" and have dispatched health attaches and other U.S. government staff to China "to work closely with our counterparts to support our mutual health goals."

In its statement, UNFPA expresses its desire to engage in an ongoing dialogue with the U.S. government and extends another invitation to visit its country office in China to see its programs firsthand. Unlike previous administrations, no U.S. government delegation has traveled to China to conduct a more thorough investigation of the facts on the ground. Instead, the State Department apparently has continued to largely rely on internet research and an examination of UNFPA project and program documents.

According to the approved five-year country program document for China (2016-2020), the Ministry of Commerce is the "coordinating entity" between the Chinese government and UNFPA—not the NHC. UNFPA's work is principally focused on organizing "executive dialogues, multi-stakeholders' consultative groups, seminars and platforms" for the purpose of supporting policy development in areas of sexual and reproductive health, adolescents and youth, gender equality and women's empowerment and population dynamics. According to their statement of today, "the UNFPA Office in China does not provide or fund any services," and the country program document does not make reference to any financial or technical assistance for family planning activities being provided by UNFPA to the NHC or any other Chinese government institution.

Surely, the State Department cannot be relying on the fact that a nearly four-year old country program document still merely lists the NHC as a "partner" to justify invoking the Kemp-Kasten amendment and denying congressionally earmarked funds to UNFPA. If that is all the "evidence" that the State Department has against UNFPA, that's some pretty weak tea.