May 20, 2020

The Honorable John Barsa
Acting Administrator
U.S. Agency for International Development
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Acting Administrator Barsa:

I am deeply disappointed in your May 18th letter to United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres regarding the UN’s Global Humanitarian Response Plan as “an opportunity to advance access to abortion.” Indeed, it appears the United States through the Agency for International Development – not the United Nations—is politicizing a global pandemic in the interest of advancing abortion policy.

I urge you to more constructively examine the UN’s Global Humanitarian Response Plan. It does not advocate for abortion nor seek to dictate other nations’ health policies. There is no call for “the widespread distribution of abortion-inducing drugs and abortion supplies, and for the promotion of abortion in local country settings” as you assert in your letter. That is a total fabrication. Instead, in several instances, the United Nations’ plan expresses real concern for the sexual and reproductive health of women in COVID-affected countries in the context of increased maternal mortality and gender-based violence, grave risks according to global experts. Protecting the unique health needs of women, ensuring safe births and safeguarding women from violence should absolutely be included in the definition of “essential health care,” and are, as you know, areas in which the United States has invested millions.

The Administration should not be playing politics on the meaning of sexual and reproductive health rights, particularly in the midst of a pandemic. Instead, we must work together to prevent the pandemic from wreaking new levels of illness, violence, and death on vulnerable women and girls.
The Secretary-General’s Global Humanitarian Response Plan does nothing to undermine the shared goal of combating COVID-19; however, your letter is simply the most recent item on a long list of tactics the Trump Administration has used to politicize this public health emergency. Through unsubstantiated accusations, the withholding of resources to the World Health Organization and the firing of inspectors general, this Administration is undermining global health.

As Chairwoman of the House Appropriations Committee, I implore you to stop the fabrication of charges that make our global response to this unprecedented pandemic more challenging and further undercuts United States leadership. I encourage USAID to continue its longstanding practice of not getting entangled in abortion politics and continue implementing life-saving interventions for the women and girls around the world who need us now more than ever.

Sincerely,

Nita M. Lowey
Chairwoman
House Appropriations Committee