

Ipas's Ejike Oji Testifies before Congress on the Global Gag Rule

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The U.S. Congress held a hearing on October 31 to illustrate the negative impact of the Global Gag Rule on family-planning programs and rates of unsafe abortion around the world. Dr. Ejike Oji, Country Director for [Ipas-Nigeria](#), testified before the full House Committee on Foreign Affairs, along with three other witnesses.

The [Global Gag Rule](#), also known as the Mexico City Policy, prohibits U.S. funding for any foreign nongovernmental organization (NGO) that provides or counsels on abortion, or lobbies to make a country's abortion law less restrictive, even if NGOs use their own money or funding from sources other than the U.S. government. The rule even applies to NGOs in countries where abortion services are legally permitted. President Ronald Reagan first established the Mexico City Policy in 1984, though the 1973 Helms Amendment already prevented U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) funds from being spent on abortion. The policy was later rescinded by President Bill Clinton in 1993, and then reinstated by President George W. Bush in 2001, with more even more onerous provisions.

Organizations that don't comply with the Gag Rule lose valuable USAID funding. Many organizations and clinics that have lost U.S. support have been forced to reduce health and education services, lay off staff or shut down.



Dr. Ejike Oji of Nigeria

In his testimony, Ipas's Oji detailed the chilling effects of the policy in Nigeria, a country of 140 million people, where one in 17 women will die from pregnancy-related causes. Each year in Nigeria, an estimated 760,000 abortions take place; 60 percent of those are unsafe. "The problem of unsafe abortion in Nigeria is made worse by our restrictive abortion laws, which deny women the opportunity to terminate a pregnancy safely. Unsafe abortion is common and every Nigerian is aware of it.

"By limiting funding to organizations that comply with the Global Gag Rule, USAID effectively punishes organizations that are working to reform the abortion law," he said. "At the same time, USAID supports organizations that are campaigning on the side of the current law, a law far more restrictive than the U.S. abortion law, and far more punitive than what the vast majority of Americans would support," he added.

"The Global Gag Rule exacerbates the situation in Nigeria whereby women have no choice about how to manage their own lives. That is what makes me so angry, because at the end of the day, it is our women - our wives, daughters and sisters - who are dying. I urge you to repeal this policy," said Oji.

The Committee also heard from Duff Gillespie, former Director of the USAID Office of Population; Joana Nerquaye-Tetteh, former Executive Director for Planned Parenthood Association of Ghana; and Jean Kagia, an obstetrician-gynecologist who is Chairperson of the Protecting Life Movement of Kenya.

The hearing can be viewed by clicking [here](#).