

Title			
Report: Parliamentary Pre-meeting 'She Decides'			
Hosted by the 'Parliamentarians for the 2030 Agenda',		Venue	Federal Parliament, Brussels
		Date:	1 March
Agenda	Session 1: The Impact of the 'Global Gag Rule' on Women's Rights and Access to Family Planning Session 2: The International Anti-gender and Anti-choice movement: Mobilizing against Equality and Women's Rights Double interview with Minister Alexander De Croo and Minister Liliane Ploumen Session 3: Towards sustained political support for sexual and reproductive health and rights in Europe and beyond	Report	Anoukh van de Wiel & Rani Marchal (Sensoa)

Introduction

On March 1st the All Party Parliamentary Group Parliamentarians for the 2030 Agenda, for which Sensoa functions as the secretariat, hosted a parliamentary pre-meeting to the international She Decides Conference of March 2nd.

Hon. MP. Karine Lalieux, vice president of the group opened the floor, reminding all present of the most recent commitments to sexual and reproductive health and rights: "As an international community we have made it one of our top priorities to tackle the unmet need for family planning. Indeed, guaranteeing universal access to family planning has been recognized by the United Nations as one of the key drivers to realize gender equality and is as such engrained in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development." She stressed how many of the participants, including many parliamentarians all over the world worked hard to ensure the inclusion of SRHR in the global agenda.

Session 1: The Impact of the 'Global Gag Rule' on Women's Rights and Access to Family Planning

Panelists: *Caroline Hickson* (Director IPPF EN) & *Suzanna Ehlers* (President & CEO Population Action International)

Moderator: Marlies Casier (Sensoa)

The Mexico City Policy or 'Global Gag Rule' (GGR) is a US policy that denies foreign organizations from receiving US funding for family planning if they use their non-US funds to do any work related to abortion. This includes providing information on abortion, providing counselling, making referrals and campaigning to legalize abortion. The reinstatement of the GGR by president Trump expanded the policy to withdraw not only family planning funding, but all US funding for global health received by NGOs, should they breach the policy's conditions.

Estimated Effects of the GGR on Organization and Women in the South

By the current expansion of the GGR, 9 billion US dollars of funding for Global Health will be scrutinized by the US administration, Suzanne Ehlers of Population Action International clarified. As for the human effects,

Hickson explained how past implementations of the GGR did not lower abortion rates but actually led to an increase in unsafe abortion cases worldwide. Although we cannot give an exact estimation of the number of women that will be affected by the GGR, INGO Marie Stopes International expects an annual increase of 2 million unsafe abortions. According to Suzanne Ehlers, the expansion of the GGR will also undermine the most-cost effective approaches in medical relief and prevention of HIV, malaria, tbc and the ZIKA virus. A fact echoed by Hickson, who pointed out that particularly integrated services will be affected by the GGR. IPPF stands to lose \$100 million support as it refuses to sign the GGR.

Session 2: The International Anti-gender and Anti-choice movement: Mobilizing against Equality and Women's Rights

Panelists: *Dr. David Paternotte* (Université Libre de Bruxelles) & *Neil Datta* (Secretary, European Parliamentary Forum on Population and Development)

Moderator : Hon. MP Els Van Hoof

Dr. David Paternotte and Neil Datta discussed their insights into the increasing consolidation between anti-gender and anti-choice movements. They associate 'gender' with any type of social innovation like comprehensive sexuality education or same sex marriage. Proponents of the movements understand 'gender' as an ideology and an international conspiracy that seeks to undermine so-called traditional, family values. The anti-choice movement seeks to promote the idea that life would start at conception, promote heterosexual marriage as the norm and present itself as vanguards of religious freedom, particular the freedom to refuse services on religious grounds or 'conscientious objection'. They both favor sexual relations solely in the context of reproduction by heterosexual couples.

The Influence of Anti-choice and anti-gender on Policy

Datta warned us for a growing professionalization in the anti-choice movement and the use of democratic tools as referendums to impact on policies and legislature. These initiatives seek to upset the consensus on abortion rights. Paternotte illustrated the influence of anti-gender movements over policy processes, by exploring how La Manif Pour Tous (MPT) rallied against the French law on same sex marriage. The speakers pointed out a trend of normative content from anti-gender movements grounding itself into far-right rhetoric and policy.

Responding to Anti-choice Movements and Rhetoric

To counter the anti-choice movement, the panelists urged NGOs and defenders of sexual and reproductive rights (SRHR) to not underestimate the opponents of She Decides. "We need to continue to work to ensure progress and not take rights for granted. Today's wins might not be there tomorrow. Thus the need to stand strong on our principles and the need to counter the growing populism that feeds anti-choice sentiment", Paternotte argued. Grass root work in the countries at stake can be one way to do so. Important therein is to refrain from using defensive language when communicating with our opponents, particularly if we want to raise awareness among the most vulnerable in need of SRHR. Datta ended the session on an encouraging note, saying that "this reaction is here because we have been winning; our progress is generating this response."

Double interview with Minister Alexander De Croo and Minister Liliane Ploumen

Panelists: *Alexander De Croo* (BE DPM and Minister of Development Cooperation, Digital agenda, Telecommunication and Post) and *Liliane Ploumen* (NL Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation)

Moderator: Hon. MP Els Van Hoof

We were happy to welcome Minister Liliane Ploumen, initiator of She Decides and Minister Alexander De Croo to hear about their efforts in supporting the funding gap the reinstatement of the GGR has created. When the GGR was reinforced, Minister Ploumen explained she did not hesitate to step into action. "My team decided

not to wait for the EU and initiate a campaign, hoping others would follow". And they did; Minister De Croo responded with a €10 million pledge and the organization of the She Decides conference on March 3rd, and support of other countries followed suit

Minister De Croo expressed optimism that the She Decides conference would function as a catalyst for other countries to join forces and make SRHR policy a priority. "We must also encourage partners to not actively block those parts of the 2030 agenda they do not agree on", Ploumen stated. In advocating undecided countries to get involved, De Croo urged parliamentarians to emphasize that "eradicating poverty is only possible by providing equal opportunities for young girls and women." At government level the Ministers envision to move the agenda forward with a group of like-minded countries or 'friends', using any future occasions to advocate for SRHR. Yet, realizing the objectives of She Decides requires also parliaments, civil society and the public to get involved.

Session 3: Towards sustained political support for sexual and reproductive health and rights in Europe and beyond

Panelists: *Arthur Erken* (Director Division for Communication and Partnerships UNFPA), *Ton Coenen* (Executive Director Rutgers), *Hon. Terry Reintke* (Member of European Parliament)
Moderator: Tim Roosen (coordinator Be Cause Health)

EU and Global support for She Decides

Hon. MEP Terry Reintke urged for a twofold participation from the EU: (1) a clear stance from the European Commission and its member-states on the GGR, specifically from the larger member states of France and Germany; and (2) a stronger network of European and non-European Parliaments, which will ensure a faster response to future legislation that would endanger women's reproductive rights.

Mobilizing civil society and affected communities

Ton Coenen clarified She Decides, the Global Fundraising Initiative. The original onset of She Decides was to start a crowdfunding campaign, where private supporters of SRHR could offer a donation. Although this enables private supporters and sympathetic organizations to get involved and to campaign, Ton Coenen argued that the funding gap will need to be bridged primarily from the governments' side. Nevertheless, the crowdfunding campaign is important to start raise global awareness.

Continuing on the importance of civic engagement, Erken advised to move away from the North-South divide and to focus on mobilizing civil society, particularly raising awareness within affected communities. As "the hey days of Official Development Assistance have ended it has become all the more important to focus on domestic resource mobilization for SRHR". "The good news is that almost all countries have reproductive health programs", Erken stressed. "Also in the US there is an overwhelming support for family planning".

Closing Words by Hon. Marie Rose Nguini Effa

(MP Cameroon and President of the African Forum for Population and Development)

In her closing words, Hon. MP Marie Rose Nguini Effa urged the participants "to unite, sign resolutions and laws and share best practices and ideas from our countries." Member of the Parliamentarians for the 2030 Agenda, Hon. MP Rita Bellens responded: "As a Member of Parliament, I will make sure women's rights will be given the attention they deserve."