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June 16, 2010.

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper,
Prime Minister of Canada,
House of Commons,
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

Re: Access to Abortion for Women in Developing Nations.

Dear Prime Minister Harper:

The United Church of Canada affirms the choice of child and maternal health as one of the Millennium Development Goals that Canada particularly wants to focus on as an ongoing development priority. As you know, women in the two-thirds world are especially vulnerable because of the ongoing issues of poverty and violence. Yet, with help, women offer the promise of being key players in building up the health and well-being of families, villages and nations.

We are glad to learn that your emphasis on maternal health will likely cover sexual and reproductive health-care services, including family planning. Hundreds of thousands of women lose their lives every year due to causes related to childbirth and pregnancy. Therefore, we encourage you to include access to safe and legal abortions as part of that care.

The United Church of Canada honours the sacredness of life and yet acknowledges the complexity of decisions regarding choices of life and death. Our 1980 policy on contraception and abortion states that: "We are called as a people of God to take responsibility for our lives and the world in which we live. This may involve making grave decisions relating even to life itself."

The United Church of Canada's policy was developed as part of a long and intensive study process that looked at human sexuality as a whole. Our position on abortion reflects:

- an emphasis on responsible sexuality
- a moral responsibility not to bring an unwanted child into the world
- recognition that there are situations when a woman and her partner may be in extremely difficult circumstances where they must decide whether or not to continue a pregnancy
- an emphasis on the decision to end a pregnancy being made thoughtfully by a woman in consultation with her doctor
- a call for adequate counseling, support, and services to be provided by medical facilities and social services for all processes related to conception and childbirth, including abortion.
- a call for thorough education regarding responsible sexuality and conception

It is puzzling that Canada may seek to restrict access to abortion in other countries through its aid funding when here, in Canada, access to abortion has been a safe, legal and funded option through our national health care plan since 1988. The health and well-being of Canadian women has been greatly enhanced because of this access. We know that other nations are willing to fund such programs without restrictions.

*The Mission and Service Fund — supporting United Church work in Canada and around the world
Le fonds "Mission et Service" soutient le travail de l'Église Unie au Canada et à travers le monde*

We therefore encourage you to:

- include access to safe and legal abortions in the array of sexual and reproductive health-care services for women in developing countries that will be funded through Canadian development aid.
- For countries where abortion is legal, we would hope that Canada would be willing to help fund this option.
- For countries where abortion is still illegal, we would ask that Canada encourage those nations to think differently about reproductive choices for women.

We would be pleased to have further conversation about this issue at your convenience.

Yours sincerely,

Omega Bula, Executive Minister
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