

GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
OFFICE

DIRECTOR

Robert D. Evans
(202) 662-1765
rdevans@staff.abanet.org

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SENIOR LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL

Denise A. Cardman
(202) 662-1761
cardmand@staff.abanet.org

Kevin J. Driscoll
(202) 662-1766
driscollk@staff.abanet.org

Lillian B. Gaskin
(202) 662-1768
gaskinl@staff.abanet.org

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL

R. Larson Frisby
(202) 662-1098
frisbyr@staff.abanet.org

Kristi Gaines
(202) 662-1763
gainesk@staff.abanet.org

Mondi Kumbula-Fraser
(202) 662-1789
kumbulam@staff.abanet.org

Ellen McBarnette
(202) 662-1767
mcbarnee@staff.abanet.org

E. Bruce Nicholson
(202) 662-1769
nicholsonb@staff.abanet.org

DIRECTOR GRASSROOTS
OPERATIONS

Julie M. Strandlie
(202) 662-1764
strandlj@staff.abanet.org

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY
LAW CONSULTANT

Hayden Gregory
(202) 662-1772
gregoryh@staff.abanet.org

STAFF DIRECTOR FOR
STATE LEGISLATION

Kenneth Goldsmith
(202) 662-1780
goldsmithk@staff.abanet.org

STAFF DIRECTOR FOR
INFORMATION SERVICES

Sharon Greene
(202) 662-1014
greenes@staff.abanet.org

EDITOR WASHINGTON LETTER

Rhonda J. McMillion
(202) 662-1017
mcmillionr@staff.abanet.org

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the American Bar Association and its more than 400,000 members, I write to urge your support for the amendment offered by Senator Patrick Leahy to the Foreign Operations Appropriations Bill, HR 2800, regarding continued funding for the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

UNFPA funds reproductive health programs in nearly 150 countries: offering aid to men and women in family planning, healthy baby programs and STD treatment. It does not support abortion service. It has long been at the forefront of HIV prevention.

In the 20 years since the HIV/AIDS crisis first surfaced as an international threat its devastation can be measured in units of dollars spent, productivity reduced, communities devastated and lives lost. In severely affected regions, the HIV virus tends to aggravate the conditions in which it flourishes--a cycle of conflict, poverty, social upheaval and internal migration hastens its spread and follows in its wake.

Even before the United Nations Security Council identified HIV/AIDS as a challenge to international stability and security in 2000, UNFPA had geared its programs to address this problem. Since the early 1990's, UNFPA has integrated HIV prevention into its core goal of assuring universal access to reproductive health services. In 1996, UNFPA joined with the World Health Organization, the World Bank, UNICEF and other international organizations to form the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS).

Among the cosponsoring organizations of UNAIDS, UNFPA is uniquely situated to address the spread of HIV infection in at-risk communities, particularly among women and adolescent girls. Its resources include an international network of offices and local experts available to support national reproductive health programs and to assist in the development of culturally and religiously sensitive responses to the HIV/AIDS crisis.

UNFPA has seen success in prevention programs developed in the hardest hit regions. For example, in Uganda, where UNFPA runs a program for young adults, HIV infection among pregnant women has dropped by as much as 40% over the last 5 years. In Thailand, from which the UNFPA runs a Technical Advisory Program servicing Southeast Asia, the prevalence of HIV infection among pregnant women and young male soldiers has fallen markedly.

The success of Uganda and Thailand in reducing HIV transmissions gives the world hope for the future. Securing funding for UNFPA will enable it to continue to assist countries in implementing HIV prevention programs. I urge you to support Senator Leahy's amendment to provide continued funding for UNFPA.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Robert D. Evans".

Robert D. Evans