



## ICRH-Mozambique statement on International Women's Day

Maputo, March 8th, 2018.

Today is International Women's Day, a day for celebrating progress made in women's rights and empowerment, as well as for making a call to action to accelerate progress to gender equality.

In Mozambique, as in many countries across the world, progress is today threatened by current US policy on sexual and reproductive health and rights. The Mexico City Policy, or Global Gag Rule, reinstated by Donald Trump just over one year ago, is gradually being rolled out across the many countries where the US government is supporting HIV and other programmes. It prohibits all non-US organisations that receive US health funding from carrying out any activities, even with other funding, that are considered by the US government to "promote abortion", including promotion of legal and safe abortion services. This leaves many organizations with a cruel choice between stopping their programmes that are dependent on US funding, or closing down other programmes which may promote access to safe abortion, in order to maintain US funding. This is particularly problematic in Mozambique, where the government has recently decriminalized safe abortion in recognition of persistently high levels of unsafe abortion which contribute to high maternal mortality, and where local partners are aligning their actions with national policy in this area.

ICRH-Mozambique, a national organization that promotes sexual and reproductive health and rights, is part of the body of organisations that promote access to safe abortion, and as a consequence last week lost its US funding. In three weeks we will close our programme that has worked for 7 years to ensure that key populations, in particular sex workers, have access to HIV and sexual and reproductive health services and protection against violence and discrimination. This work is currently funded under the PEPFAR-supported Passos project, through which we have been working over the past year to provide services to over 2,000 sex workers in 5 districts of Tete province, including through the Moatize Night Clinic. We have also trained and supported 432 health providers and 37 health facilities across 8 provinces to provide non-discriminatory, rights-based services to key populations, and supported 6 local partners in 7 provinces to provide community counselling and testing services. We are now forced to cease all of these activities on 31 March.

ICRH-M does not promote abortion. We promote the right of all women and girls to have control over their own bodies, in particular to decide whether and when to have a baby. This includes promoting access to contraception, and to safe abortion when needed, and we support the Mozambican Government's efforts in this area.

Our call to action on this International Women's Day, therefore, is to the US Government, to reverse its fatal decision made on 23rd January 2017 in reinstating and expanding the Mexico City Policy. The implementation of this policy will not decrease the number of abortions, it will however ensure that more of these are unsafe and result in the death or illness of women and girls, through hampering efforts of the Mozambican Government and its partners to provide comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services.

**Is it for the US government to decide that in Mozambique deaths from HIV are unacceptable, but those from unsafe abortion are OK?**