



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**A Healthy and Dignified Life:
A Statement by DotW USA President, Dr. Ron Waldman**

NEW YORK, NY (January 29, 2017) – Recently, my wife put a bumper sticker on her car that reads, “Not My Values.” I found it very sad to realize that everyone who saw it would know exactly what it means. In a very short time, her values, and all of ours at Doctors of the World, have been threatened, demeaned and even, in some ways, outlawed. But I think it is important for all of us, and especially for Doctors of the World, part of a network of humanitarian organizations that does its work thanks to the generosity and kindness of others, including the US Government, to not only protest the values of others, but to make it crystal clear exactly what our values are.

Events are unfolding at lightning speed and every day seems to bring shocking and gut-wrenchingly upsetting news, so in this message I would like to focus on just three of our core beliefs that have been challenged.

1. We believe in equal rights for women: this is not the first time that the Mexico City Policy, also known as the Global Gag Rule, has been instituted on the first day of a new administration. Every Republican president since Reagan has done so, and every Democratic president has repealed it just as quickly. But for President Trump, what was a harsh, punitive, and harmful law that has apparently backfired on its proponents by resulting in more abortions, not fewer, and unsafe ones at that, was not enough. Not content to attempt to put an end to all reproductive health activities supported by the US Government, Mr. Trump’s version of the Gag Rule may have an impact on every aspect of global health funding by every agency of the US Government. In the end, this policy is likely to nullify, and to reverse, many of the impressive gains that have been made in the health sector over the last several decades. The impact will be greatest on women and on their children. We believe strongly that every woman, by virtue of her humanity, has the right to social equality, economic equality, political equality, and perhaps most importantly to us, an equal right to a healthy and dignified life. The Gag Rule would deny that right to those who need it the most, and we vigorously oppose it.
2. We believe in the humane treatment of prisoners of war and, indeed, of all soldiers and civilians who have been detained, arrested, and imprisoned. We find it abhorrent and detestable that the President of the United States should suggest that our Government employ barbaric and illegal means to extract information it feels might be useful just because he believes, with no evidence to support him, that “torture works.” To be clear: we would prefer that our country fight harder to overcome its enemies, even on an uneven playing field, rather than have it sink to the moral depths of those enemies. We strongly support the United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhumane, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, but as a humanitarian medical

organization we say emphatically that we do not need official pronouncements to understand that the use of torture is a gross violation of the core ethical standards that guide our actions. We note with some satisfaction that members of the President's cabinet, including the Secretary of Defense and the Director of Central Intelligence, appear to agree with us and we fervently hope that their views prevail.

3. We believe that all individuals who flee their country in times of political upheaval, civil strife, war, or out of fear of political, ethnic, or religious persecution, have the right to seek refugee status. Our country was founded by people who met these conditions. Our history has been enriched throughout by refugees who have made their mark in all walks of life. Our leadership on the world scene has been characterized by empathy, opportunity, and welcome. The United States refugee resettlement program has long been the most important in the world. We believe that the recent Executive Order imposing an indefinite ban on refugees from Syria, severe restrictions on immigration from seven majority-Muslim countries, and suspending all refugee resettlement for four months is unfair, inhumane, and will have negative consequences on the health of many who will be forced to remain in conflict areas against their will. Lives will be unnecessarily lost. This policy stands in polar opposition to the values that form the ethical and moral foundation of our organization and, indeed, of our society.

We do not just believe, we know, that these three actions of the President of the United States – the imposition of the Gag Rule, the use of torture, should it be allowed, and the slamming shut of the doors to our country – will be harmful to the individuals Doctors of the World seeks to protect. They serve only to increase the suffering of the most vulnerable and the most marginalized. But the damage that they will do and the suffering that they will cause will not be confined to the voiceless. And so, we raise our voices, as physicians and health workers, on behalf of all those who are targeted by these unjust policies, not only in protest, but in clear and resounding affirmation of our own values, ones that we will not sacrifice or abandon, not now, not ever.

Ron Waldman, MD MPH
President
Doctors of the World USA

About Doctors of the World

Doctors of the World USA is a US non-profit that is part of the global Médecins du Monde network. We provide emergency and long term medical care to vulnerable people, while fighting for equal access to healthcare worldwide. Founded in France in 1980, the network cares for the most vulnerable through more than 400 programs in over 80 countries around the world.

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