

You need to have pretty thick skin to be pro-life publicly nowadays. So hats off to the Canadian government, which may not embody the Culture of Life, yet rejected abortion as a solution to problems. Last month at the G8 conference, the Canadian government put forth its proposal for reducing maternal and child morbidity in the developing nations. Canada shocked the other G8 nations when its International Cooperation Minister Bev Oda said, *“Canada’s contribution to maternal and child health may involve various interventions ...; however, Canada’s contribution will not include funding of abortions.”*¹ *We agreed that our efforts would need to include nutrition (and) disease prevention and that all of our actions should cover the full continuum of care from pre-pregnancy, pregnancy, delivery and early childhood.”*²

Canada's decision prompted the usual extreme reaction from abortion advocates, including our Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, who patronized the Canadians by saying, *“Well, I’m not going to speak for what Canada decides”*³, then proceeded to tell them what to do. She continued, *“but I will say that I’ve worked in this area for many years. And if we’re talking about maternal health, you cannot have maternal health without reproductive health. And reproductive health includes contraception and family planning and access to legal, safe abortion.”*⁴ She then lectured the Canadians, *“Obviously, the extraordinary rate of maternal deaths that still occur in our world in countries where women do not have access to family planning remains a great tragedy. ... I do not think governments should be involved in making these decisions.”*⁵

Sadly, but predictably, Ms. Clinton disregarded the facts. In April, 2010, a group of researchers from the University of Washington published an analysis of maternal mortality in The Lancet, which is available at www.thelancet.com. They found that the world's maternal mortality rate (MMR) declined from 422 deaths per 100,000 livebirths in 1990 to 251 per 100,000 livebirths in 2008⁶. While still too high (representing an estimated 342,000 women), the decline, which was unexpected, occurred independent of the availability of abortion. According to these researchers, over half of the deaths occurred in just six⁷ of the 181 countries studied. Of these six countries, India and Ethiopia allow abortion for social reasons; Pakistan and Nigeria allow it for health reasons⁸. Only Democratic Republic of the Congo and Afghanistan ban abortion. Conversely, several countries with the lowest

1 www.thestar.com/news/canada/article/800755—ories-leave-abortion-out-of-g8-plan; April 26, 2010

2 www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE63R59N20100428, April 28, 2010

3 <http://www.america.gov/st/texttrans-english/2010/March/20100331162133xjsnommis0.109367.html#ixzz0muwvNKrg>; March 31, 2010

4 Ibid

5 Ibid

6 Maternal Mortality for 181 countries, 1980-2008: a systematic analysis of progress towards Millenium Development Goal 5, Margaret C. Hogan et al, www.thelancet.com published online April 9,2010. [http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(10\)60518-1](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(10)60518-1)

7 Ibid, Findings

8 Source: Summary of Abortion Laws Around the World by Pregnant Pause <http://www.pregnantpause.org/lex/world02.jsp>, Internet access, May, 2010.

rate of maternal death have strict restrictions on abortion. For example, Ireland, Poland and Malta⁹ have lower maternal mortality rates (6, 7, and 6, respectively) than the United States (17, which means 40 countries have lower MMR). Furthermore, legalized abortion hasn't helped countries like South Africa whose maternal mortality has been stuck in the 200 MMR range for the past 25 years. In contrast, the Philippines and Egypt have reduced their MMR from the 300-400 range to the 40-100 range¹⁰ - without abortion. The countries showing the most improvement in MMR during the past 25 years either severely restrict abortion (Egypt, Bangladesh, the Philippines) or had enacted permissive laws prior to 1980 (China, Romania, India)¹¹. There are as many countries with low abortion rates and low MMR (7 countries) as there are countries with high abortion rates and low MMR (6 countries).¹² The world doesn't need legalized abortion to achieve low MMR.

The U.S. Government, by asserting that nations need to eliminate pregnancy in order to reduce maternal mortality, and backing up the rhetoric with funds for groups working to overturn other countries' abortion bans, demonstrates rigid ideology and overreaches to the point of interference. The Canadian government chose to focus on strategies that truly improve the lives of women and children, the strategies to which all could agree (like safe water, basic medical care, prenatal care and skilled birth attendants). Certainly, the Canadian government has more respect for the sovereignty of the nations they are trying to help by respecting these nations' anti-abortion laws, unlike their imperialistic “Big White Mother” in Washington.

9 “Maternal Mortality for 181 countries”, Table 1 Ireland's and Malta's MMR is 6

10 Ibid, Egypt's MMR declined from 352 (1980) to 43 (2008); while the MMR in the Philippines declined from 443 to 84. South Africa MMR was 209 and is now 237, as its young women are ravaged by HIV.

11 The countries with the most improvement in MMR are: (Egypt - illegal; India - legal since 1971; Bangladesh -illegal; Philippines – illegal; Romania – legal since 1957; China – legal since 1979)

12 Percentage of Pregnancies Aborted by Country - compiled by Wm. Robert Johnston www.johnstonsarchive.net/policy/abortion/wrjp334pd2.html Internet access May, 2010

Cross referenced to Table 1 of “Maternal Mortality” - Countries with high abortion rates (higher than U.S.) and low MMR (lower than U.S.): Hungary, South Korea, Serbia, Singapore, Slovakia, Sweden. Countries with low abortion rates (less than 5%): Austria (legal but rare), Bosnia (legal but rare), Luxembourg (legal but discouraged), Malta (illegal), Poland (restricted), Qatar, (illegal), United Arab Emirates (illegal). Austria's health system does not pay for abortion (per Wikipedia, May, 2010).