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**Women's Rights NGO Raises Strong Concerns
over Nomination of Randall Tobias to Head USAID**

The nomination of Ambassador Randall Tobias to head the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) deepens concern over the United States' commitment to long-term international development strategies that serve the needs of the most vulnerable, particularly women and girls worldwide. The Ambassador currently is head of the Office of the Global AIDS Coordinator (OGAC) at the Department of State.

"Under Ambassador Tobias' watch at OGAC, the U.S. has carried out a controversial approach to HIV prevention that goes far beyond any congressional mandate, by, among other things, limiting access to condoms even in generalized epidemics and hampering effective outreach to sex workers," stated Jodi L. Jacobson, Executive Director of the Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE). "Because Tobias has shown himself vulnerable to pressure by the extreme right at OGAC we feel his nomination to head USAID at this critical moment is cause for great concern."

"As Administrator of USAID, Ambassador Tobias will oversee a large portfolio of development programs that affect the health and rights of women and girls," stated Jacobson. These programs include critical efforts to expand and strengthen reproductive health and family planning programs worldwide; programs which are a matter of life and death in countries where complications of pregnancy, childbirth, unsafe abortion, and HIV infection are the leading killers of women ages 15 to 49. Under previous Administrations, USAID was arguably the leading global agency in developing effective, evidence-based programs to address these problems, and in providing technical assistance to countries in every region.

"However, under President Bush, the extreme right in the United States has been given 'carte blanche' in controlling both domestic and international policies and programs addressing reproductive and sexual health, including HIV prevention," asserted Jacobson.

"Tobias has been all too willing to accede to the demands of the extreme right in developing policies and programs based on ideology rather than evidence," stated Jacobson.

For example:

-- Ambassador Tobias has put in place HIV prevention policies focused on "abstinence-only-until-marriage" and "secondary abstinence." These strategies go far beyond any Congressional mandate, despite the vast and mounting evidence that such programs leave large segments of

the population at immediate risk of HIV infection. In Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania between 55 and 71 percent of those ages 15 to 24 are **already** sexually active, yet under current U.S. policies this group gets **no** information, skills, or training on safer sex strategies. In other countries in sub-Saharan Africa, new infections are rising fastest among married women, further demonstrating that abstinence-until-marriage HIV prevention programs have no relationship to common modes of HIV transmission.

-- Ambassador Tobias has made inaccurate public statements on the role of condoms in reducing the spread of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. In a March 2004 Congressional hearing, Tobias testified that the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) had reported that condoms were ineffective in preventing the spread of HIV for the general population. In response, the President of LSHTM wrote Ambassador Tobias, "[W]e cannot find the source for this claim. Indeed, there has been a steady stream of publications from LSHTM attesting to the importance of condom promotion as a part of any comprehensive HIV prevention strategy." Yet the Ambassador repeated the same claim in another Congressional hearing in May 2004. In another unsupported statement in April 2004, he asserted that "[s]tatistics show that condoms really have not been very effective."

-- Ambassador Tobias has funded questionable organizations despite their lack of technical competency. Tobias approved a \$10 million grant for HIV prevention to the Children's Aid Fund (CAF), despite the fact that the proposal submitted by CAF failed to pass review by an expert technical committee. The organization is run by Anita and Shepherd Smith, supporters of President Bush. Anita Smith also serves as the Chair of the President's Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS. Under OGAC, many other, similar organizations, including those that qualify simply because they are "faith-based," are now receiving large sums from the U.S. government without adequate mechanisms for monitoring their use of U.S. taxpayer funding.

-- Programs focused on the needs and rights of women are largely absent from the OGAC strategy, despite the fact that the highest rates of new infections are in older adolescent girls ages 15 and above and in married women in their twenties and thirties. The female condom -- the only currently available female-controlled method of HIV prevention -- is largely ignored by OGAC.

"Ambassador Tobias' willingness to foster an ideological agenda under OGAC raises serious questions about his treatment of other sensitive issues that will fall within his purview at USAID, such as broader reproductive health and family planning programs," stated Jacobson. "Such programs remain a primary target of the extreme right in the United States. Given his past history, we have no confidence that Ambassador Tobias would stand up to an ideological assault on these programs."

Before confirming him for this post, "the Senate must ensure that Ambassador Tobias is committed to non-partisan humanitarian aid programs that seek the best methods -- and use the best people -- to improve health and reduce poverty worldwide. Humanitarian aid programs should respond to needs of people, not politicians," Jacobson concluded.

The Center for Health and Gender Equity is a U.S.-based non-governmental organization focused on the effects of U.S. international policies on the health and rights of women, girls, and other vulnerable populations in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. www.genderhealth.org. If you have difficulties viewing this message or wish to unsubscribe, please e-mail change@genderhealth.org.