

Carl Rowan's Commentary

Maria Elena Absalon Ramirez knows nothing about the U.S. Congress. And members of Congress certainly aren't aware of Maria's humble existence near Mexico City.

But a debate that's being waged in Congress over cuts in U.S. foreign aid can critically affect the health and well-being of Maria's family, and of millions more desperate families in developing countries.

Maria and her husband practice birth control with condoms they receive free, along with instruction for their use, from MEXFAM, whose work is financed in part by U.S. assistance.

"Cuts in the foreign aid bill would eliminate funding for some of the largest and most influential family planning organizations and jeopardize the survival of a 30-year-success story in international family planning," warns Victoria Markell, vice president for political affairs at Population Action International (PAI), a private nonpartisan organization based in Washington.

The bill, which was passed by the House and is scheduled for Senate debate, slashes family planning funds and says that a foreign organization can't receive aid unless it agrees to an abortion litmus test that allows Washington to dictate how it spends not just U.S. assistance, but non-U.S. funds as well.

Tens of millions of couples around the world benefit directly from contraceptive supplies and family planning services funded by the U.S. government, says PAI. Tens of millions more rely on programs that have benefited from U.S. technical assistance — everything from training personnel to contraceptive manufacturing technology.

Experts estimate that 85 percent of the women who lose access to modern contraceptive services will become pregnant within one year; of these, at least one third will resort to an abortion. Among those women giving birth, one in 10 of their infants and young children will die. For every 250 live births, one woman will die.

The United States has been a leader in the international population field for three decades. It has helped build a partnership in which developing countries themselves now provide family planning services and supply more than two-thirds of the funds spent.

With help from USAID, contraceptive use in developing countries has increased more than twelvefold since the early 1960s, and world population growth has slowed. That means a better life for the people of those countries; it gives them more time to develop their economies, ultimately reducing their reliance on foreign aid. And it has a positive impact on the rest of the world by cutting the number of immigrants and refugees, relieving pressure on the environment, defusing the potential for civil strife, building up new trading partners.

Working together, countries of the world have made a start toward helping people like Maria and her family — and all of this planet's inhabitants. It would be tragic and stupid to stop now.

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CARL ROWAN

TO BE EQUAL

POINT OF VIEW

Rebuilding churches, rebuilding communities: A vision for the 21st century

By Hugh B. Price
President,
National Urban League

Last week the National Urban League, the National Conference, the Anti-Defamation League, and the National Council of La Raza announced the formation of "National Voices for an Inclusive 21st Century."

This unprecedented collaboration of national leadership will fight the bigotry and racism now poisoning America.

The following is an excerpt of the historic arrangement of the four organizations:

America faces a fateful fork in the road as the millennium approaches. The fork in question is where our robustly pluralistic society is headed.

We are witness today to some frightening trends which threaten the social cohesion that binds our people and thus our nation together. We are bombarded daily with distressing news accounts of arson attacks on black churches which are the very womb of the African American community. Of cowardly and recurring acts of desecration of synagogues and schools with swastikas. Of the wanton beating of unarmed and disenfranchised Latino migrants. The flames of bigotry and injustice are soaring higher today than they have in a generation.

These incidents and others confirm that bigotry and racism remain an ugly reality of American life. It is urgent and imperative that law enforcement officials capture and prosecute the perpetrators. Given the sheer volume of incidents over so many months, we are dismayed the sluggish pace of investigations and arrests at every level of law

enforcement. But we are gratified that the momentum seems finally to be building.

As much as we welcome the heightened FBI and police activity, we must remember that their energy is focused only on the egregious symptoms of the poison in our society, not on its sources. That's why we have joined forces to challenge all Americans and our government to rid our society of the scourge of bias, bigotry, and racism while there is still time.

The victims of bias come in all complexions and faiths — and from all corners of the earth. Their suffering should dwell on the consciences of all who would polarize the American people.

The responsibility for combating bias, bigotry, and racism and promoting understanding and respect rests with all of us.

We are all diminished by any act of violence and discrimination against others among us. None of us can hide on the sidelines hoping it won't touch our families.

Our four organizations recommend six concrete ways for people of good will to wage war against bigotry. The six focal points for immediate action are:

- 1) Combat incendiary rhetoric, biased reporting and wedge politics.
- 2) Promote community healing and harmony.
- 3) Transform colleges and universities into models as opposed to mirrors, of American society.
- 4) Affirm the nation's commitment to inclusion.
- 5) Cease police abuse of individuals rights.
- 6) Convene a Presidential Summit on American Pluralism in the 21st Century.

We realize that racism will

not disappear tomorrow even if we succeed on these six fronts. But it will subside. These initiatives alone will lay the foundation for renewed trust and further progress.

CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL

The U.S. and hidden killers

By Bernice Powell Jackson

We don't think about them much here in the United States because we aren't forced to. Our children are not threatened by them



as they play, our farmers don't have to worry about them as they plow. But landmines threaten the lives of thousands of children and many farmers in other parts of the world. Unfortunately, the U.S. government has come down on the wrong side of the debate about the production and use of landmines, with President Clinton recently rejecting a plea to ban immediately the American use of landmines. Instead, the President decided to allow the military to continue using landmines in Korea, while seeking a permanent worldwide ban on these weapons in the next century.

Landmines are the small explosive devices buried in the ground which are detonated by trip wires or pressure plates when a person stands on them. Every year 20,000 people are killed by them and most of the victims are civilians. Thousands more are maimed by these devices, often losing arms and legs. The principal victims are poor rural people, often children and farmers. "The chances are ten times as great that the victim of a landmine is going to be a civilian rather than somebody in the military," said United Nations mine expert Paddy Blagden.

A recent State Department report estimates there are at least 85-100 million landmines scattered throughout the world, with new mines being laid every

day. They are available on the international arms market for as little as \$3 per mine. A third of all mines lie in Africa, with 10-20 million in Angola alone. Angola has amputee rates in the world as a result of these mines.

The costs for treating civilians wounded by landmines is enormous and most of the countries affected are the poorest. Mine injuries require surgeons, large supplies of blood and antibiotics, prosthetic devices and close follow-up. Indeed, the individual, the family, the community and the nation are all severely impacted by the consequences of landmines.

With President Clinton's recent announcement, the United States stands with China and Russia in continuing to insist on producing and using landmines. Thirty-nine other nations, including our closest NATO allies, have now stated their support for an immediate and comprehensive ban of the mines. Even the U.S. military is divided on their use, with 15 high-ranking retired military officers urging the President to ban these weapons in an open letter this spring.

There is no rhyme or reason why our military still uses landmines, whose principal victims are civilians, often innocent women and children. The U.S. can do better than this — we can be better than this.

(You can write to President Clinton about banning landmines at the White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington, DC 20500.)

POINTS TO PONDER BY PROFESSOR #HARRIS#

BLACKS ARE ONLY 12% OF AMERICA'S POPULATION - BUT WE ARE THE MAJORITY OF THE PEOPLE IN PRISON!!

AH... YES... JUSTICE, AMERICAN STYLE!!

IF AMERICAN HISTORY WAS REVERSED - DO YOU THINK A BLACK RAN SOCIETY WOULD HAVE BEEN AS OPPRESSIVE AS A WHITE ONE?

#HARRIS#
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