

Clinton's remarks on reproductive rights spark Catholic concern

WASHINGTON – U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton's recent remarks expanding the definition of reproductive rights to include abortion have sparked criticism and warnings from a U.S. church official and a Catholic congressman.

Clinton's comments are a "real threat" to U.S.-based international aid agencies, such as Catholic Relief Services, which do not promote or provide abortions, said Deirdre McQuade, assistant director for policy and communications at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities.

"The news is that she's not being euphemistic anymore," McQuade told Catholic News Service in early May.

On Capitol Hill in late April, Clinton responded to a series of questions from Rep. Chris Smith, R-N.J., a leading pro-life member of Congress and a Catholic.

"Reproductive health includes access to abortion," Clinton said. "We are now an administration that will protect the rights of women, including their rights to reproductive health care."

Smith's questions were prompted by Clinton's praise of Planned Parenthood founder Margaret Sanger at an award ceremony in Houston March 27. During the ceremony, Clinton said Sanger's work had yet to be completed. Sanger, who wrote "The Pivot of Civilization," advocated for population control via access to birth control and abortion.

During the Capitol Hill hearing, Smith asked Clinton: "As part of Sanger's work that remains undone ... is the Obama administration seeking to weaken or overturn pro-life laws and policies in African and Latin American countries either directly or through multilateral organizations including ... the U.N., African Union or the (Organization of American States), or by way of funding (nongovernmental organizations) like Planned Parenthood?"

“And so we have total transparency, does the United States definition of the term ... ‘reproductive health’ or ‘reproductive services’ or ‘reproductive rights’ include abortion?” Smith asked.

Clinton responded that she respected his views but noted their “profound” and “fundamental disagreement.”

“It is my strongly held view that you are entitled to advocate, and everyone who agrees with you should be free to do so anywhere in the world, and so are we,” she said.

She added, “We happen to think that family planning is an important part of women’s health, and reproductive health includes access to abortion that I believe should be safe, legal and rare.”

In an interview with CNS, Smith expressed concern that Clinton’s redefinition of reproductive health severely could threaten the pro-life policies of developing countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America, as well as the pro-life policies of CRS and other pro-life agencies.

If U.S. dollars from the U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief and the U.S. Agency for International Development sponsor reproductive health care that must include abortion, then countries and organizations with pro-life policies could be forced to change their policies to include abortion in order to receive U.S. funding, Smith explained.

“Money is coming with abortion strings attached,” he said, urging the U.S. government not to taint the money with the killing of unborn children.

With these strings attached, he said, “an entire generation of Latinos and Africans dies.”

“Money subsidizing abortion pays for more abortion,” Smith said.