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WORLD MEDICAL ASSOCIATION STATEMENT ON FAMILY PLANNING AND THE RIGHT OF A WOMAN TO CONTRACEPTION

Adopted by the 48th General Assembly
Somerset West, Republic of South Africa, October 1996

This text is an amalgamation of two previous WMA Statements, namely those on "The Right of a Woman to Contraception" (originally Doc. 10.D) and on "Family Planning" (originally Doc. 17.E), both of which it now supersedes.

1. The World Medical Association recognises that unwanted pregnancies may have a significant and ongoing effect on women's health and on the health of their children. Therefore, the World Medical Association approves of family planning, in as much as the objective is the enrichment of human life, not its restriction.
2. The World Medical Association asserts that all women should be permitted to opt for fertility control by choice rather than by chance. The ability to regulate and control fertility should be regarded as a principal component of women's physical and mental health and social well-being. Contraception can prevent premature deaths of women from the consequences of unwanted pregnancies. Optimal planning of childbearing also will contribute to infant and child survival and can help to assure greater opportunity for individuals to reach their full potential. Thus, women have the right to know about their bodies and how they work and should have access if they so desire to all the medical and social counselling necessary to benefit from family planning. Men should also receive instruction in contraception.
3. A strong but largely unmet demand for fertility control exists in many developing countries. In these countries, many women who are not currently using contraception wish to avoid pregnancy. The World Medical Association asserts that it is a woman's right, regardless of nationality, social rank or creed, while taking into consideration the family situation, to exercise individual choice in regard to contraception. If a woman requires a service that a doctor feels unable to provide, the woman should be referred. The freedom of women to have access to contraception must be protected and safeguarded against any pressure group.

4. The World Medical Association therefore:

- a) recommends that each national medical association actively promote the benefits of family planning education and works with government and other groups, where appropriate, to ensure high standards of delivery of materials, information and assistance;
- b) encourages all medical schools to include family planning as a component of maternal and child health within the medical curriculum; and,
- c) affirms its desire to support and promote family planning by encouraging appropriate organizations to conduct conferences, symposia, or studies on relevant aspects of family planning.

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