

She Decides: donors respond to the Global Gag Rule

by Camilla Burkot
3 March 2017

On Thursday in Brussels, donor countries and private funders responded to the [return of the Global Gag Rule](#) under President Trump by raising €181m (US\$190m, A\$251m) for the [She Decides initiative](#). These funds will go part of the way to closing the [estimated US\\$600m funding gap](#) that will be left as a consequence of the Global Gag. The amount pledged so far falls well short of that goal – but for an initiative that only took shape in late January, it's not a bad return.

Canada, France, Finland, and Sweden all pledged about US\$20m, while Belgium, Denmark, Norway and the Netherlands committed approximately US\$10m each, as did billionaire Chris Hohn of [CIFF](#). The Gates Foundation made an 'initial pledge' – evidently one of several to come over 2017 – of US\$20m over the next four years. Melinda Gates also announced that the Gates Foundation and DFID will co-host a family planning summit in London later this year. The biggest single grant – of US\$50m – was given by an anonymous, US-based donor. (You can watch a recording of the conference [here](#)).

Australia's newly installed third Ambassador for Women and Girls, Dr Sharman Stone, attended the Brussels conference on behalf of the Foreign Minister. She delivered a statement ([starts from 3:29:15](#)) welcoming "all initiatives that support sexual health and family planning, especially at these particular times" and describing Australia as a "strong champion" of sexual and reproductive health and rights. She also affirmed that "access to sexual health and reproductive services, particularly family planning, remains critical to women's empowerment", a cornerstone of Australia's aid program.

However, to the [disappointment of sexual and reproductive health advocates](#) including [Senator Lisa Singh](#), Australia did not pledge any new funds at the conference. Rather, Ambassador Stone 're-announced' the [announcement made by the Foreign Minister](#) at last month's Australasian Aid Conference to replenish A\$9.5m to support [IPPF's SPRINT initiative](#). This was met with applause and [seems to have been considered](#) 'Australia's contribution' to She Decides. However, it should be noted that this \$9.5m is simply a continuation of earlier funding, and is equal in quantity to the previous (second) replenishment.

The UK similarly made no new contribution at the She Decides conference, with Minister for International Development Rory Stewart [instead highlighting](#) that the UK

government's existing spending on family planning totals £200m (US\$245m, A\$324m).

Fundraising efforts to fill the Global Gag gap will no doubt be ongoing, but at the same time advocates must not neglect to shore up and defend existing policy and funding streams. As Ashlee Betteridge and I noted [previously](#), the risk that Australia's current, relatively progressive family planning aid guidelines may be rewritten to mimic the US Global Gag is real, particularly with the government under pressure and a conservative Senate crossbench.

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Link: <https://devpolicy.org/decides-donors-respond-global-gag-rule-20170303/>