

Canadian government gives \$8 million to world's largest abortion drug provider

Pro-life advocates have expressed outrage that Canada has given a grant of \$8 million to Marie Stopes International (MSI), the world's largest abortion and abortifacient drug provider.

"While Kenya and Niger have recently banned Marie Stopes International for promoting and providing abortion – actions which are illegal in both countries – Canada is giving the organization \$8 million towards sexual and reproductive health rights which includes abortion," said Michel MacDonald, executive director of the Catholic Organization for Life and Family (COLF).

"It's very unfortunate that western nations continue to ignore the voices the majority of the African people who do not want and are not asking for abortion, any kind of abortion care, as well as contraception," said Obianuju Ekeocha, founder and president of Culture of Life Africa, in a Skype interview from the United Kingdom.

"Africans are asking for food, education, clean water, and security, because of threats for from terrorist groups in some of the African countries."

"We are not asking for condoms, contraception, or sexuality education, that kind of advice, or abortion given to us by western donors," the Nigerian-born Ekeocha said.



Obianuju Ekeocha

International Development Minister Marie-Claude Bibeau announced the \$8 million grant to MSI as part of a \$104.4 commitment made in Kigali, Rwanda Nov. 13 as the minister participated in the International Conference on Family Planning.

Those monies are part of the \$650 million Canada committed in March 2017 to reproductive health, including abortion, worldwide.

Since 2017, MSI has also received a grant of \$4 million targeting sub-Saharan Africa, and \$12.3 million for projects in Tanzania. The new \$8 million grant is not allocated to a specific country or project.

On Nov. 27, Niger ordered that two MSI facilities operating in that country be closed down because they performed illegal abortions. According to a report by Reuters, MSI did not respond to the accusations, but said it is cooperating with authorities and other centres the agency operates in Niger remain open. Niger permits abortion only when the pregnancy endangers the mother's life.

On Nov. 14, Kenyan authorities banned MSI from providing abortions after an investigation into a breach of advertising laws where MSI reportedly breached the law by promoting abortion services over Kenyan radio networks.

"It's great to see two African counties standing up against Marie Stopes International," said Ekeocha. "There are many more African counties that have begun to question the work of MSI in their villages and their cities."

A spokeswoman for Global Affairs Canada, however, reiterated the Canadian government policy regarding funding. "Canada does not support the funding of abortions in countries where it is illegal," said Maegan Graveline in an e-mail.

"Canada's safe abortion programming is delivered in accordance with the legal and regulatory frameworks of the countries where we work."

Ekeocha pointed out the \$8 million Canadian grant to MSI is "fungible," and frees up monies the agency can put towards abortion.

"MSI has been caught out in violation of laws in different African countries," Ekeocha said. "I would like Canadians to look again at the nature of what their government is doing internationally."

MSI not only performs illegal abortions, money from its western donors goes into lobbying African governments "so they come closer to legalizing abortion, giving them a bigger market for abortion," Ekeocha said.



Matthew Wojciechowski

Matthew Wojciechowski, project manager and expert on United Nations policy with Campaign Life Coalition called Canada's grants to MSI and similar agencies is "literally ideological colonization."

It's "worse than that" because "you're spending Canadian tax dollars for agencies that use the tax money to undermine" that country's sovereignty and the "rights and deeply-held values of families that have been living there, their culture and traditions."

This lobbying not only aggressively tries to change abortion laws, but also promotes same-sex marriage, gender theory, and other programs that are anti-parental rights, he said.

While the Canadian government has said it does not fund abortions in countries where it is illegal, Wojciechowski points out it does support the lobbying efforts.

"Is this is the best use of Canadian money, of Canadian taxpayers dollars—that it goes to a British organization that is going into Africa, and Africans have complained and lamented this organizations has violated that country's laws?" Ekeocha asked.

Ekeocha produced a documentary entitled *Strings Attached* that included interviews with women from Kenya and Uganda who had either obtained abortions or were given long-acting contraception in the form of intrauterine devices or injections from MSI without follow up for severe side-effects.

Abortion is illegal in Kenya unless the mother's life or health is at risk.

Ekeocha screened *Strings Attached* in Ottawa last April to a gathering of

parliamentarians and diplomats from several African countries. She screened it in October to members of the UK Parliament. In the New Year, she hopes to make the documentary available through online streaming services, so it can be more widely available in African countries.