

Obama restores funds for overseas family planners: The Mexico City policy

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Antiabortion religious leaders are criticizing President Obama's decision to restore federal funding of international groups that provide abortions or information about the procedure.

"An administration that wants to reduce abortions should not divert U.S. funds to groups that promote abortions," said Cardinal Justin Rigali of Philadelphia, who heads the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Pro-Life Activities.

The so-called Mexico City policy, which bans U.S. government aid to groups involved with abortions, was first enacted by President Ronald Reagan in 1984. President Bill Clinton rescinded the ban in 1993; President George W. Bush reinstated it in 2001.

Obama said January 23 that the policy had "undermined efforts to promote safe and effective voluntary family planning in developing countries." He announced the end of the ban one day after the 36th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, the U.S. Supreme Court decision that decriminalized abortion.

"For too long, international family planning assistance has been used as a political wedge issue, the subject of a back-and-forth debate that has served only to divide us," the president said. "I have no desire to continue this fruitless and stale debate."

Conservative religious groups immediately criticized Obama. Said Jay Sekulow, chief counsel of the American Center for Law and Justice: "President Obama wasted no time in letting the nation know what many pro-life Americans suspected—[he] is committed to promoting pro-abortion policies." -*Religion News Service*