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**Report of the
International Review Team
on the
UNFPA China Country Programme**

22 – 27 October 2001

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Mission Report

Background

1. On 4 October 2001, the Population Research Institute (PRI) reported alleged abuses by family planning workers in one of the counties receiving UNFPA assistance under the UNFPA country programme in China. On 17 October 2001, PRI presented these allegations to a full committee hearing of the U.S. House International Relations Committee. A transcript of the testimony of Ms. Josephine Guy, Director of Governmental Affairs, America 21, is attached as attachment 1. [See the background note on the Population Research Institute on pp. 7-8 of this report.]

2 UNFPA takes all such reports seriously. The Executive Director therefore decided to send an independent international review team to China to determine whether and to what extent these allegations were true. A primary objective of the team was to visit one or two project counties, including Sihui County where the alleged abuses took place, to review the UNFPA-funded integrated reproductive health service project in terms of achievements and constraints as well as government commitment at the grass-roots level. The team was also to meet with senior Chinese officials in pertinent ministries to receive a comprehensive briefing on China's population programme. The terms of reference of the team are included as attachment 2

International review team

3. The independent international review team fielded by UNFPA consisted of four members: Ambassador Nicolaas Biegman, former Ambassador of the Netherlands to the United Nations and Chairman of the Main Committee of the International Conference on Population and Development in 1994, who served as the head of the team; Ms. Noemi Ruth Espinoza-Madrid, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Permanent Mission of Honduras to the United Nations, who served on the team in her personal capacity; Ms. Jana Simonova, Minister Counsellor of the Permanent Mission of the Czech Republic to the United Nations and former Vice-President of the UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board; and Ms. Emolemo Morake, First Secretary of the Permanent Mission of Botswana to the United Nations and former Vice-President of the UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board.

4. The team was accompanied by two staff from UNFPA headquarters – Mr. Xu Shuyun, Deputy Director of the Asia and Pacific Division, and Mr. Richard Snyder, Chief of the Executive Board Branch. Ms. Junko Sazaki, UNFPA Country Representative, a.i., in China also accompanied the team throughout its visit. Mr. Xu and Ms. Sazaki are fluent in Chinese. Several staff of UNFPA's Beijing office accompanied the team on its visits to Sihui County and Qianjiang County – Dr. Estrella Serrano, a United Nations Volunteer (UNV) who serves as technical adviser on the project; Mr. Magnus Bjork, Junior Professional Officer and Programme Officer on the project; and Ms. Ren Yanan, UNFPA Programme Assistant, who also served as interpreter during the visits.

5. The Chinese Government welcomed the visit of the team and made every effort to expedite the team's mission, including the issuance of visas on extremely short notice (the visit was put together in less than a week) and the arrangement of meetings with high-level officials, including those at the ministerial level.

6. The programme of work of the team and the list of people met during the mission are provided in attachments 3a and 3b.

Programme monitoring

7. The fourth UNFPA programme in China may be the most monitored development programme anywhere in the world. It is certainly the programme that has been most frequently monitored by outside parties.

8. The international review team was the sixth international team to visit projects under the UNFPA-funded programme in China. The first such visit took place in December 1997, prior to the approval of the country programme by the Executive Board, and included 17 participants from both developed and developing countries. The second team visited two project counties in August 1999. It was composed of 12 staff from the U.S. Congress and was accompanied by a U.S. State Department official. The third visit took place in November 1999. The team consisted of 10 participants from developed countries. The fourth and fifth visits centred on the mid-term review (MTR) of the programme: three participants (from Australia, France and the United States) visited one project county in May/June 2001 to observe the implementation of the programme and to identify achievements and areas requiring further improvements, prior to the conduct of the MTR; and 15 participants (from both developed and developing countries) participated in the MTR meeting in June 2001. A list of Executive Board participation in the fourth UNFPA country programme, giving the counties visited and the purpose of each visit, is attached as attachment 4.

9. In addition to these external monitoring visits, the UNFPA field office in Beijing also carries out systematic monitoring missions of projects in every county. A list of these monitoring missions is attached as attachment 5. Moreover, the UNFPA programme receives systematic technical assistance from UNFPA Country Technical Services Teams (CSTs), which participate in MTRs, monitor the distribution and use of information materials at the field level and examine the implementation of various components of the projects, among other things. A list of the CST missions is provided in attachment 6.

Meetings and briefings

10. During the visit, the team received briefings from various Chinese officials, as these were considered indispensable to understanding China's population programme and how the UNFPA country programme fits within the overall policies of the Chinese Government in this area. Dr. Zhao Baige, Director General of the Department of

International Cooperation of the State Family Planning Commission (SFPC), highlighted the recent trends in global population, development and family planning and noted the impact that these trends had had on the reform and opening up of China's work in reproductive health and family planning (RH/FP). Such reform began in 1995, in the wake of the International Conference on Population and Development, with the "two changes" in family planning work -- a change in thinking and a change in methodology. In practical terms, this meant the beginnings of the transition from an administratively-oriented approach to a client-oriented, quality-of-care approach, which was pilot tested in five counties in 1995 with the assistance of The Ford Foundation. Dr. Zhao noted the international support that had influenced and facilitated this transition, emphasizing in particular the important role of the UNFPA reproductive health project in this process.

11. Dr. Zhao cited changes in some key indicators that had taken place since the implementation of the UNFPA reproductive health project in 1998 -- a decrease in the birth rate (from 11.44 per 1,000 to 10.62); a decrease in the abortion ratio (from 0.18 to 0.11); a decrease in the maternal mortality ratio (from 62.9 per 100,000 live births to 52.2); and a decrease in the female sterilization rate (from 35.8 to 25.5 per cent). She said that the UNFPA project had influenced government decision-making in introducing informed choice of contraception, building capacity to provide comprehensive and quality reproductive health care, and facilitating clients' understanding and exercise of their reproductive health and reproductive rights. This point was echoed by the Vice-Minister of the State Family Planning Commission, Mme. Zhang Yuqin.

12. The discussions with Chinese officials were frank and open. Such openness and frankness, in fact, characterized all of the meetings the team had throughout its visits, both in Beijing and in Sihui and Qianjiang counties. The team never lost sight of why it had come to China, and it persistently and tenaciously pursued its objectives in every discussion, at every visit, during every lunch and even on every bus ride. The overwhelming message that emerged from all the meetings and visits was that Government officials and the practitioners of the reproductive health project in the two counties visited are genuinely committed to the new client-oriented, quality-of-care approach, as opposed to the former administratively-oriented approach, and to expanding this approach to other counties in China.

Achievements and constraints in the UNFPA programme

13. The main achievement of the UNFPA integrated reproductive health project is the important catalytic role it has played in the reform of RH/FP services from an administrative family-planning approach to a client-oriented, quality-of-care approach. The former approach focused on population control, administratively imposed contraceptive methods and administrative orders. The new approach promotes informed choice of contraceptive methods through information, education and counseling; provides comprehensive reproductive health services to meet the individual needs of clients; builds capacity to provide quality RH/FP care; and facilitates clients' understanding and exercise of their reproductive health and rights.

14. The UNFPA project appears to have had a significant influence on senior and mid-level government officials in this regard, particularly as a vehicle to introduce and implement strategic thinking and policy changes. Indeed, the impact of the UNFPA programme on the reform and opening up of China's work in the area of reproductive health and family planning seems to be far, far greater than the miniscule amount of resources the programme provides (some \$3.5 million in 2000), not only in the 32 counties in which UNFPA works, but throughout China as well. The team feels very strongly that this is the case. But the team is not alone in this belief: virtually everyone the team talked to or met in the Chinese Government – from the Vice-Minister of the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation (MOFTEC) and the Vice-Minister of the State Family Planning Commission to the general practitioner in the RH/FP and maternal and child health (MCH) clinics – repeatedly emphasized this point as well.

15. This view was reinforced by officials at the U.S. Embassy in Beijing, who noted that UNFPA was definitely a positive force in moving China away from precisely the kinds of practices and abuses alleged by PRI. By this measure, they said, the UNFPA programme had been extremely successful. The officials further noted that UNFPA had had a direct, positive effect on the language of pending new legislation on family planning and reproductive health – a point that was reinforced by the Vice-Chairperson of the National People's Congress, Mme. Peng Peiyun, who previously had served as the Minister of the State Family Planning Commission. Mme. Peng said that UNFPA had been particularly influential in the legislation's language on the rights of clients. She noted that the legislation would most likely be taken up by the National People's Congress some time in December 2001.

16. Another important achievement is the UNFPA programme's emphasis on interpersonal counseling and informed choice of contraceptives. Virtually all of the clinics the team visited were actively engaged in such counseling services, discussing with clients the advantages and disadvantages of various contraceptive methods and making use of colorful and easy-to-understand manuals and pamphlets to help clients make informed choices. In Sihui City, pamphlets explaining the approach and services of the UNFPA project, *as well as the elimination of coercion and the lifting of quotas and targets*, were distributed to all households – a point that was substantiated by the team in numerous conversations. (The team had a copy of the pamphlet and often asked the people it met if they had seen it before. A copy of the pamphlet in Chinese and in English translation is attached as attachments 7a and 7b.) Such information was also clearly displayed and made available at all clinics the team visited, often times with the information on coercion and quotas and targets displayed in bold-face characters.

17. The Mayor of Sihui City provided the team with the following comparative statistics for 1998 and 2000, the period the UNFPA project had been in effect in his municipality:

<u>Indicator</u>	<u>1998</u>	<u>2000</u>
Rate of informed choice (%) of contraceptives	0	86.3
Rate of unintended pregnancy (%)	4.33	1.94
Birth/abortion ratio	1 to 0.46	1 to 0.21
Contraceptive prevalence rate (%)	85.9	88.9
Maternal mortality ratio (/100,000 live births)	21.1 (1 death)	50.5 (2 deaths)
Infant mortality (/1000 live births)	16.7	13.8
Rate of in-hospital delivery (%)	78.6	98.1
Rate of clean delivery (%)	99.9	99.9
Pregnancy administration system coverage (%)	90.1	93.7
Service for high risk pregnancy (%)	97.7	99.3
Incidence of gynecological disease	24.2	15.4
Treatment rate for STIs (%)	92.6	91.2

The number of abortions also decreased dramatically in Qianjiang County, decreasing from 1,000 in 1998 to 480 in 2000.

18. The main overall constraint the team encountered concerned the residual aspects of the former administrative approach – not so much in the actual practices the team observed (for those did seem to genuinely reflect a client-oriented, quality-of-care approach) but in the uncertainties that one naturally feels during any transition period of fundamental change, particularly when the practices and approaches of the recent past are still in force in surrounding counties and in people's minds. The team feels strongly, in this regard, that the UNFPA programme is *the* key to smoothing the way to a truly client-oriented, quality-of-care approach *throughout* China. The team especially feels this way because so many of the high-level government officials it met emphasized this point, as did the officials at the U.S. Embassy. It is important to note in this context that such an approach is now being implemented in some 860 counties, or approximately one-third of the total number of counties in China, as a direct result of the influence of the UNFPA programme. As noted above in paragraph 10, the total number of counties pilot testing such an approach in 1995 was 5.

PRI alleged abuses

19. The allegations made by PRI were the crux of the issue that brought the team to China. At the outset of its work, the team understood, and accepted, the difficulties inherent in trying to determine whether such abuses did or did not take place. It is particularly difficult to prove that an alleged action *did not* take place. This task was made all the more difficult owing to the lack of specific information in terms of when and where the alleged abuses took place and the presence of obvious factual errors and

misleading information in the allegations. (For example, UNFPA has only one office in China (in Beijing); it therefore does not have an office in Sihui City as alleged in the PRI report and shown in the video accompanying Ms. Guy's testimony before the House committee hearing. Nor could UNFPA have refused to give PRI the addresses of its offices in the 32 counties, as alleged in the PRI report, since such offices do not exist.)

20. The difficulty of the investigation was compounded further by the fact that PRI was either unwilling or unable to provide the team with the following information before the team embarked on its mission: the location or name of the hospital where PRI investigators claim to have witnessed a 19-year-old woman being led into a room to undergo a forced abortion; the names or locations of any other facilities that PRI said were participating in coercive practices or any other information of a specific nature that could help the team locate instances of coercion in Sihui County or any other Chinese county where UNFPA is active; or details on the location of the alleged UNFPA office in Sihui County. (A formal request to PRI to provide such information is attached as attachment 8.) This limited the team's investigation to interviews with anyone who happened to be in clinics or walking down the street in Sihui City or in neighbouring villages (see paras. 22 and 23).

21. In response to the team's query regarding an alleged incident concerning a woman who had escaped a forced abortion, the Mayor of Sihui City provided the team with a copy of an investigation report of an incident that took place in Sihui County in 1996 that bore some resemblance to the incident described by PRI. The record of the investigation into this incident (in the original Chinese and as translated into English) is attached as attachments 9a and 9b. The Mayor explained that this is the only incident of this kind known to him.

Interviews and responses

22. The richest sources of information were the people and practitioners the team met during its visits to Sihui and Qianjiang counties. The members of the team took every opportunity to talk to people – on the street, in family planning and mother and child care (MCH) clinics, in villages – as this was the only method available given the short time frame of the mission and the vagueness of the allegations that had been made about the UNFPA programme (see the section below on the PRI allegations). Everywhere it went, the team asked numerous questions concerning the alleged abuses: How many children do you have? Are you satisfied with the number of the children you have? Do you want more children? Have you been forced to have an abortion? Do you know anyone who has been forced to have an abortion? What is your perception of Chinese policy? Has it changed in recent years and have you seen any differences in official attitudes towards such policy? Are you happy with the services you are receiving? Have you experienced coercion of any kind? Are you aware of, or have you heard of, any abuses in family planning?

23. There was a wide range of responses. Many people said that the policy had been considerably relaxed in their area in recent years and that the quality of the care they

received had improved considerably. They said that these improvements were particularly evident in the counseling they received on contraceptive methods and in the range of reproductive health services provided. Many people said they had one child; a surprising number said they had two children; and a small number said they had three or more children. Many said they were satisfied with the number of children they had; some said they would like to have another child and would consider doing so based on their own situations in the future. Several noted that the quality of their children's lives was far more important to them than the number of children they had. No one expressed any grievances or complaints of any kind, or knew of any abuses in recent years. Such abuses had occurred in the past, they said, but not at present. None seemed to know of any forced abortions. The overall impression the team came away with was that the Chinese approach had changed and that the people the team met were aware of, and benefiting from, this change (see the section below on achievements and constraints).

24. Finally, the team asked practically every official and RH/FP service provider it met during its visit if they knew of any such abuses. None did. The team also asked these officials and practitioners if such abuses were possible. They all said yes, such abuses were possible, but those responsible for them would be punished in accordance with the severity of the abuse in that Chinese law now specifically forbids such abuses. The team feels that it is, in fact, specifically in this area that the UNFPA project plays perhaps its most important role – namely, it represents the international standards of reproductive health and rights to which China says it aspires and the international acceptance China seeks.

25. When asked by the team if there were mechanisms in place to air grievances against such abuses, the Vice-Minister of the State Family Planning Commission identified four channels that were available: the SFPC at all levels, from the central level in Beijing to the grass-roots level; the Women's Federation at the local level; various non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including the Family Planning Association, at all levels; and the legal system (through lawsuits) and the media. She said that in all such cases the violators would be punished.

Note on the Population Research Institute

26. It is essential to any investigation of allegations to be familiar with the source of those allegations. This section of the report provides pertinent background information on the Population Research Institute (PRI) and its President, Mr. Steven Mosher. As noted in the background information provided by PRI to the full U.S. House committee hearing on 17 October, PRI is "a non-profit educational organization whose research and publications serve as a check on the designs of the radical population control movements." Moreover, according to the same background note, "PRI is the principal voice pointing out not only the abuses of the population control movement, but also the underlying fallacy of sacrificing authentic economic development for wasteful, inhumane and often coercive population control programs". The note goes on to say that Mr. Mosher's latest book is entitled: *Hegemon: China's Plan to Dominate Asia and the World*, which was published by Encounter Books in 2000.

27. PRI is not unknown to UNFPA, nor are its false and baseless allegations, its distortions and fabrications, and its disinformation campaigns. The PRI disinformation campaign against UNFPA in Kosovo in 1999 is a case in point. Indeed, the misinformation propagated by PRI (including in the Albanian-language press in Kosovo) that UNFPA was a partner in Slobodan Milosevic's ethnic cleansing campaign resulted in several threats against UNFPA staff, including local staff working in Kosovo, and was intended to disrupt the delivery and use of essential equipment and services.

28. UNFPA's response to these allegations concerning Kosovo is provided in attachment 10.

Recommendation

29. As is clear from the report above, the international review team is convinced that the UNFPA programme is playing, and will continue to play, a very positive and important catalytic role in the reform of RH/FP services in China from an administrative family-planning approach to a client-oriented, quality-of-care approach. The team is further convinced that the UNFPA programme is *the* key to smoothing the way to a truly client-oriented, quality-of-care approach *throughout* China. The team is also convinced that the UNFPA programme is a positive force in moving China away from precisely the kinds of practices and abuses alleged by the Population Research Institute. The team therefore strongly recommends that the UNFPA programme in China not only be continued but be expanded in terms of the scope of its operations and resources allocated to it.