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Her Excellency Dilma Rousseff  
Presidência da República Federativa do Brasil  
Praça dos Três Poderes  
Brasília - DF, 70150-900, Brazil

President Rousseff:

The Secular Policy Institute and the undersigned organizations call on the governments of the Zika virus affected states to adopt and implement contraception and abortion policy commensurate with this situation and to start the path to recognizing reproductive agency as a human right. The 2015 Zika virus outbreak that started in Brazil has quickly spread to over 30 countries, leading the World Health Organization (WHO) to declare a global health crisis. It also disproportionately affects the poor and those in rural communities where access to medical services and information may be limited; therefore, averting a greater public health threat from complications with unsafe and medically unsupervised contraceptive and abortion services is of utmost importance. The concerns represent the intersection of women's health, medical science, and culture and religion.

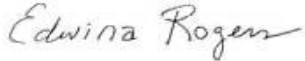
Though absolute causality has yet to be confirmed, Zika outbreaks have been associated with microcephaly, a fetal brain deformity (reduced brain volume and skull size). While Brazil had a reported 147 cases of infant microcephaly in 2014, reports have neared 4,000 post-outbreak. Zika is known to be spread by the aedes mosquito and has been found active in human saliva, blood, urine, and potentially semen. The Zika virus' rapid proliferation has led the Director-General of the WHO to declare Zika a "Public health emergency of international concern."

As the number of those affected by Zika increases, there are concerns that laws prevent access to contraceptive services may lead women to pursue dangerous methods to prevent or terminate pregnancy. One solution offered by multiple governments is for couples to delay insemination until 2018. This recommendation is undermined by the fact that half of pregnancies in the region are unintentional. Because the availability of contraception and abortions ranges from difficult to criminalization, women may instead seek clandestine, often dangerous, alternatives.

According to the WHO, 68,000 women die annually from complications from unsafe abortions. The Brazilian Federal Council of Medicine has stated that these abortions are the fifth leading cause of maternal mortality in that country (with more than 200,000 hospitalizations annually). These deaths and complications also disproportionately affect those in poverty or rural areas. The lack of autonomy and liberty of women in states lacking sufficient reproductive legal protections is compounded in times of crisis such as this.

The Secular Policy Institute calls upon the governments of the countries affected by the Zika virus to adopt and implement reproductive agency and health legislation in order to ensure that when contraceptive or abortion services are sought, they are administered and supervised by qualified medical professionals. Safe effective contraceptive use is a human right, and must be recognized as one in order to avoid compounding the challenges associated with the spread of the Zika virus.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Edwina Rogers".

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