



International Center for Traditional Childbearing (ICTC)
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June 23, 2009

Mr. Jason Opeña Disterhoft
Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Campaigner
Amnesty International USA
600 Pennsylvania Ave. SE
Washington, D.C. 20003

Dear Mr. Disterhoft,

Thank you inviting the International Center for Traditional Childbearing (ICTC), to endorse the Amnesty International principles for health care; these principles will help to reduce maternal mortality in America. ICTC is a Black infant mortality prevention, breastfeeding promotion and midwife training not-for-profit organization, established in 1991. Our mission is to increase the number of Black midwives, doulas, and healers to empower families, in order to reduce infant and maternal mortality.

The Black maternal mortality rate can be prevented. According to Siefert, Kristine, Martin, Louise, & Doss (1988), "Reproductive services for Black women are not the solution; instead a holistic approach must be implemented to include physical, mental and social well-being for this population".

We are pleased to support your efforts and develop a partnership to improve our current health care system. I am gratified that Amnesty International USA position is in-line with the ICTC mission. We agree that health care is a basic human right that should be afforded to all, with no exceptions. Black midwives and healers have a solid history of providing maternity services to the indigent and the wealthy alike, with an emphasis on improving community health. It is truly our hope that a health care policy will readily manifests itself in accordance with the ideology that all are created equal; devoid of cultural, ethnic, gender, and class biases. Through our collective efforts we can mend the US health care system. To that end, I am pleased on behalf of the ICTC to sign on.

In addition ICTC has also endorsed the Obama-Biden Health Care Reform Act, and as a social justice organization ICTC supports health care reform, cultural competency in maternity care, primary prevention, infant and maternal mortality reduction, and improved maternity care in the prisons. ICTC recognizes that maternal and infant mortality is the result of many social determinants, including social, environmental and behavioral challenges and that the solution must be comprehensive.

ICTC recommends eliminating the systemic racism that increases premature births and low-birth weight for babies in the Black community.

Evidenced based research has proven that midwifery improves birth outcomes. We need outreach mechanism, media and institutional directives to steer Black women to midwifery care and a system to increase the number of Black midwives to offer culturally comprehensive care. Midwives provide nutritional information, give more time to prenatal visits, respect family values, provide advocacy and referral and actively promote breastfeeding. Our recommendations are inclusive of all the above statements and the following:

ICTC recommends:

- 1) The elimination of social determinants that create poor outcomes in the Black community, as a priority in health care reform.
- 2) Nutritional curriculum in elementary school, access to quality food and improved nutrition in all federally funded programs, including hospitals and prisons; and expand eligibility and the dollar amount of food stamps, WIC, and free and reduced lunches.
- 3) Recognize maternity care as an essential part of public health and a priority area in health care reform discussions in the U.S.
- 4) Support the expansion and equitable payment of qualified primary maternity-care providers through federal recognition of all state licensed maternity care providers.
- 5) Consider the single payer system and capping the mal-practice insurance rate for health care providers to continue providing care.
- 6) Increase the use of evidence-based maternity care practices, such as the JJ Way- by Jennie Joseph; and ensure that all women and their families have access to quality, affordable health care services and the providers of their choice.
- 7) Mandate that all private and public maternity centers that receive federal funding have 20% of their maternity staff be midwives of color.
- 8) Mandate that all health care insurance companies pay for Doula services for women at and below the federal poverty level.
- 9) Incorporate federal campaigns that promote midwifery services for all women.
- 10) Fund a national breastfeeding promotion campaign to support breastfeeding in order to support public health efforts.

11) Incorporate the western European model of paid maternal and paternal leave so that parents can adequately care for their infants to reduce failure to thrive syndrome, infant mortality, reduce postpartum depression and other illnesses.

12) Provide federal scholarships and loans for distance learning midwifery education that meet the US Board of Higher Education standards.

Through the collaborative efforts of midwives, health care providers, educators, policy makers and the health consumer, we can leave a better world for our children. Let's start by bringing these children into the world as healthier babies.

Sincerely,

Shafia M. Monroe, CM

Shafia Monroe,
President and CEO