

Lack of Accessible Healthcare Information

Faith Woo, Membership Chair, UNA-USA at USC

The current measles outbreak is an urgent human rights concern caused by a lack of accurate, accessible public health information in the United States. Measles is a vaccine-preventable disease. The vaccine has been around since the 1960s and is over 97% effective after two doses, yet we are seeing a troubling rise in cases. In 2024 alone, the U.S. reported its highest number of measles cases in years, many of them in unvaccinated children.

At its core, this is not just a public health issue, but a human rights issue. Everyone deserves to live in a community where disease prevention is prioritized, where health education is accessible and culturally relevant, and where no one dies of a preventable disease. Yet in many parts of the country, that's not the case. Primarily low-income, immigrant, and rural populations lack access to timely information about vaccines and disease prevention. Health messaging is frequently written at too high a reading level, not translated into enough languages, or distributed in places where people don't get their information. Additionally, with the rise of misinformation on social media, it becomes even harder to distinguish fact from fiction. As a result, many people make decisions based on fear, not facts, and it's costing lives.

Children are especially vulnerable. Measles isn't a harmless childhood illness like many people think. It can cause pneumonia, brain swelling, deafness, and even death. According to the CDC, for every 1,000 children who get measles, 1 to 3 will die from it. The fact that parents aren't being properly informed of these risks, or even worse, are being misled by anti-vaccine rhetoric, is a public health failure. It's a failure to protect the most basic rights of families. Parents have the right to accurate health education, and children have the right to be protected from preventable diseases. When that doesn't happen, we're not just dealing with an outbreak, we're dealing with a breakdown in the health system.

Addressing this issue requires more than just pushing for higher vaccination rates. It means investing in culturally competent public health education, creating targeted outreach programs in communities with historically low trust in the medical system, and actively combating misinformation online and offline. Healthcare providers and public health agencies need to meet people where they are. Whether that's in churches, schools, barbershops, or social media platforms, we need to listen to their concerns without judgment. It's not enough to say "trust the science" if we don't take the time to build that trust.

In the end, no one should die from measles in 2025. We have the tools, the science, and the knowledge to prevent it. What we need is the will to treat access to health information as a right, not a privilege, and to make sure no community is left behind.

Foreign Aid

Tejaswani Gupta, Co-Treasurer, UNA-USA at USC

From prosthetic limbs to injured soldiers in Ukraine, tackling the spread of Ebola in Africa, hospitals in Senegal to schools in Haiti, USAID, the United States Agency for International Development, was improving the lives of millions of individuals across the globe. Established on November 3, 1961, through an executive order by President John F. Kennedy, USAID was positioned as a humanitarian initiative. In practice, USAID serves as the United States Department of Foreign Aid, providing assistance to countries in their development and growth.

Many times multilateral foreign aid has faced criticism, due to its political nature. Aid became a means of a political tool to help new nation-states (newly decolonized countries) move towards Western ideologies. The Global South benefited because in order to develop their infant economy, they needed an inflow of cash and capital, and foreign aid provided that. The 1960s was also the era of developmentalism, where Truman's theory of modernization and development stated the Western countries' responsibility in helping lesser developed countries develop. Hence, USAID's relevance significantly increased, and it also solidified America's will to help the international community.

The recent shutdown comes as no surprise, as it is synonymous with the administration's "Make America Great Again" and "America First" ideology. As abrupt and irrational as the step seems to be, it encourages a deeper analysis of what USAID truly represented—and whether its shutdown could signal a long-overdue shift toward economic self-determination for the Global South. Accepting aid can lead to the erosion of their own country's sovereignty, as Western countries often intervene heavily in internal affairs. Occasionally, corrupt leaders use aid as a tool for political negotiation or embezzle it. There are times when the aid does not even reach the targeted audience; instead, it is used by Western institutions to "develop" the less developed country (Klein et al.).

This also creates competition for the domestic industries. For instance, Haiti received aid in the form of "rice." This benefitted foreign suppliers and hindered the growth of domestic industry. Until recently, Haiti would get the entire supply of rice through USAID (Kakissis et al.). U.S. companies operate private schools and clinics in Haiti. USAID was funding these companies, which run parallel to public institutions. The local companies and organizations ran out of business. This forces their economy to be reliant on cheap land and labor, continuing the vicious cycle of poverty and toxic dependencies.

So, perhaps the USAID shutdown is not a catastrophe—but a catalyst. I propose a solution which I am positive will work given its success on smaller scales. With globalisation where we are moving from local to global, we need a top down approach of micro-financing—recognizing the target audience and uplifting them. It is time for us to change the conventional ways of approaching problems and conditions. The minimum USAID was receiving, can be used to start a micro-aid agency. Even if it is as low as 1% of the budget, it will be able to fuel the economies of thousands of communities. The dollar is valued so high compared to the Global South that even a few thousands of dollars—which is not even a fraction of U.S. GDP—will be beyond impactful.

1. Joanna Kakissis and Kate Bartlett and Eyder Peralta and Diaa Hadid Feb 11, 2025 5:18pm (NPR). "How the Gutting of USAID Is Reverberating around the World: Worry, Despair, Praise." NCPR, North Country Public Radio, 31 Dec. 1969, www.northcountrypublicradio.org/news/npr/g-s1-47661/how-the-gutting-of-usaid-is-reverberating-around-the-world-worry-despair-praise.
2. Klein, Betsy, et al. "USAID to Lay off 2,000 Employees and Put Most Remaining Staff on Administrative Leave | CNN Politics." CNN, Cable News Network, 24 Feb. 2025, www.cnn.com/2025/02/23/politics/usaid-employees-administrative-leave-email/index.html.

The Right to Freedom of Assembly and Minority Rights in the United States

Penny Uampornvanich, Director of Social Media and Marketing, UNA-USA at USC

The purpose of this shadow report is to signify how the right of freedom of assembly in the United States has been continuously disregarded, against individuals across all backgrounds, especially regarding the current political turmoil after President Trump has won the presidential

election.

Lately, there has been an increase in unrightful forces and methods used to battle one's freedom of expression, which is against what the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) values and stands for. To start with, under a university setting, mistreatments like the use of brutal force and verbal abuse are carried out by the police and the university security such as the Department of Public Safety (DPS) to forcefully disperse peaceful protests. Upon arresting students, local police or DPS may treat protesters unfairly from the implementation of personal biases and negative beliefs and deprive them of basic human needs like access to water, food, and toilets. Despite university being known to be a safe space where students of all backgrounds, interests, and identities are allowed to freely express their opinions and learn more from different perspectives, when it comes to those who have pro-Palestine views, students may receive unequal treatment alongside threats and various methods to input fear in order to prevent them from speaking up and calling out harmful actions. Students who have openly advocated for the rights of minorities and people whose voices are suppressed even if it is by spreading awareness and resources such as regarding the current genocide in Palestine are being detained, suspended or expelled by the university, and treated poorly. This includes individuals who have engaged in pro-Palestine activities and demonstrations. Moreover, some are even threatened to be deported by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and in some cases, are currently in the process of being deported by the ICE. For instance, a 21-year-old student from Columbia University named Yunseo Chung, someone who has been legally and permanently living in the U.S. since she was 7 years old, is now being targeted by the Trump's administration to be deported.

Another pressing issue of the violation of human rights is that Trump has lately signed a memorandum to remove the term "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion," also known as DEI, from the Foreign Service. Many universities have steered away from using the term DEI as a result. For example, the University of Southern California (USC) has also replaced the term "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion" (DEI) with "Community" as a new change in the academic institution's long held unifying values. Personally, this can make people that are from marginalized communities feel less heard and seen and under-supported in finding opportunities and being treated fairly from places like the corporate or educational setting. Furthermore, this may increase discrimination and social stigma against minority groups such as people with a different race, religion, sexual orientation and more.

Overall, there are two main concerns regarding human rights being violated in the United States as highlighted in this report: the right of freedom of assembly or freedom of expression and the freedom from discrimination and minority rights.