



Press Release

For immediate release:
Wednesday, August 20, 2008

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Presidential Nominees' Health Care Plans Fail to Meet Human Rights Standards, a New Assessment Finds

(New York) – Senators Obama and McCain have put forward health care reform plans that fail to meet human rights standards, according to an analysis by the National Health Law Program (NHeLP) and the National Economic and Social Rights Initiative (NESRI). This new assessment, based on human rights guidelines for health care reform, finds that both plans rely on market competition to solve the current health care crisis, without addressing how markets could be incentivized to put health protection ahead of profits.

Despite significant differences in approach, the nominees' plans share a focus on a consumer product, insurance coverage, rather than on actual health care. Neither plan recognizes the human right to health care – a right guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (adopted in 1948). Within those limitations, Senator Obama's plan is closer to the mark than Senator McCain's, primarily because it may increase access to coverage, whereas Senator McCain's plan would likely result in reducing the number of people able to obtain meaningful coverage.

"I was a little surprised that the candidates didn't do better in our assessment," said Dr. Anja Rudiger, the director of NHeLP's and NESRI's Human Right to Health Program and author of the report. "Both of them talk about giving everyone access to affordable, quality health care. But the substance of their plans doesn't live up to their rhetoric – the devil is in the details. The plans clearly lag behind the public's demand to have our human right to health care protected, as opinion polls show."

According to human rights standards, the human right to health care requires a system of health protection, which ensures that everyone can get adequate health care, where and when they need it, regardless of their ability to pay.

"The opportunity exists for the nominees to take some basic steps towards meeting human rights standards, and we've set those out in this report," said Dr. Rudiger. "At a minimum, they need to rein in the private health care industry that's trampling our rights and ruining not only our health but also our budgets. And they must ensure that reforms include everyone and don't leave some of us behind – we need a system that works for each and every one of us."

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The publication, "The Human Right to Health Care: Nominees' Plans Lag Behind Public Demands," is available at http://www.nesri.org/Human_Rights_Assessment2.pdf