

Abstract

This paper provides a chronological account of the evolution of the concept and policy of reproductive health and its initial entry, and subsequent exclusion, from UN declarations. In the 1990s effective lobbying by sexual and reproductive rights activists established reproductive health for all as a UN goal. However, at the Millennium Assembly of 2000 and in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), an 'unholy alliance' of the Holy See and a handful of conservative Muslim governments managed to keep reproductive health off the agenda. This was successful political manoeuvring for the short-term, but the alliance fell apart and the power of the theoretical and empirical case in support of reproductive health saw it return to the MDGs in 2005. The moral standing of religious institutions, such as the Holy See, is undermined by such opportunistic, short-term political behaviour and, in particular, the ambiguous legal status of the Holy See at the UN is called into question.

Keywords: Reproductive health, Sexual and reproductive rights, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), UN, Development ethics, Religion and development, Holy See, Abortion

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