PRESS RELEASE
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Lawmakers in Dominican Republic Should End Total Abortion Ban Now

On April 22nd, the Chamber of Deputies began meeting in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic to debate the decision to loosen the total abortion in the country. The current law, instituted in 1884, outlaws abortion even when a pregnancy is life-threatening, not viable, or the result of rape or incest. Furthermore, the law punishes women and girls who have abortions with up to 2 years in prison, and medical providers who provide abortions with up to 20 years. This criminalization of abortion directly endangers the lives of women and girls in the Dominican Republic, and violates international human rights agreements. The criminal penalties for physicians force them to betray their professional fiduciary duty to put highest priority on their patients’ interests. Global Doctors for Choice (GDC) stands in support of the proposed bill to end the total abortion ban in the Dominican Republic.

Decriminalization of abortion is sweeping through Latin America. In December of 2020, shortly after being elected, President Abinader had advocated for the decriminalization of abortion in certain instances such as risk to the pregnant woman’s life, fetal malformation, rape, and incest. After receiving negative backlash from anti-abortion groups and representatives from the Catholic Church, President Abinader reversed his position. On March 17th, 2021, the justice commission of the Chamber of Deputies rejected a similar proposal to ease current criminal abortion penalties. This refusal by the justice commission sparked widespread protests both nationally and internationally.

The decision by any one country to withhold lifesaving medical treatment violates multiple international accords and the basic obligations of medical practice. Furthermore, prosecuting women, girls, and abortion providers is an act of discrimination which perpetuates harmful stigmas and violence. The international community must stand in solidarity with abortion advocates in the Dominican Republic to urge the Chamber of Deputies, Senate, and President Abinader to approve this necessary and life-saving bill now.

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Global Doctors for Choice (GDC) is an international network of physicians who advocate for reproductive rights and access to comprehensive reproductive health care, including safe abortion and contraception. GDC is committed to the defense of human rights and to the provision of high-quality medical care grounded in science.