

May 12, 2017

Honorable Diputado Guillermo Gallegos
Presidente, Asamblea Legislativa
República de El Salvador
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Honorable Mario Alberto Tenorio
Presidente de la Comisión de Legislación y Puntos Constitucionales
República de El Salvador
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Dear Honorable Presidents:

We write to you on behalf of Global Doctors for Choice (GDC), an international medical network of diverse disciplines and areas committed to improving the health and rights of the woman. GDC is committed to providing high quality medical care based on science and the defense of human rights. We strive to protect and expand access to comprehensive reproductive health care through advocacy based on empirical data and medical research.

We, with the utmost respect and a base of scientific knowledge, request you to approve reforms to Article 133 of the Penal Code regarding the decriminalization of abortion for the following circumstances: when the life of the woman is at risk, when the pregnancy risks the physical or mental health of the women, when the pregnancy has malformation incompatible with life, and when the pregnancy is a product of sexual violence, rape, or incest.

Currently, when a pregnancy threatens a woman's life there is no legal way to stop the pregnancy and save the life of the woman. When a woman is forced to continue with the pregnancy that is causing her serious harm, this is the equivalent of torture and puts the woman's life at risk. Science shows, that when a pregnancy can be fatal, abortion is often the only option that can save a woman's life and safeguard her health.

Prohibiting abortion ties doctors' hands in times of crisis during the woman's pregnancy. Apprehensive of harming a pregnancy while in the process of saving a woman's life, doctors find themselves in a situation where they cannot practice medicine due to the fear of being prosecuted for the crime of abortion. Thus, the criminalization of abortion sanctions and limits medical practice.

El Salvadoran law currently does not allow abortion under any circumstances, not even when the doctor considers it absolutely necessary to save the woman's life. Any doctor can be convicted to two to eight years of imprisonment, simply for trying to save the life of a pregnant woman. The only way to protect medical practice, public health, and the lives of women in El Salvador is to legalize abortion.

Between 2005 and 2008, the Ministry of Health counted 19,290 clandestine abortions. Yet others estimate that this number is the annual average. According to the 2011 data from the World Health

Organization, 11% of the women and girls in El Salvador who obtained a clandestine abortion died. In addition, suicide is the leading cause of death among pregnant adolescents in El Salvador.

Many international committees such as the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, the United Nations Human Rights Committee, and the International Committee on Civil and Political Rights have said that the prohibition of abortion is a fundamental violation of women's right to life and health.

That is why, as a global network of doctors, we urge you to support the reform of Article 133 of the Penal Code and unite the El Salvador with the rest of the world by legalizing abortion - to save the lives of women and to protect the medical practice of professionals who have a duty and commitment to save a woman's life and improve public health in El Salvador.

Respectfully,

ANA CRISTINA GONZÁLEZ V.

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