December 6, 2015

Dear Ambassador,

Teodora del Carmen Vásquez is currently serving a 30 year prison sentence in El Salvador for aggravated homicide after suffering a still-birth at work. The police accused her of having induced an “abortion”; in reality, she had suffered an obstetric emergency that resulted in the loss of her pregnancy.

As Amnesty International’s recent report, “Separated Families, Broken Lives—El Salvador: Women Imprisoned for Obstetric Emergencies and the Impact on Their Families,” documents, Teodora’s trial was flawed and lacking in due process. She was presumed guilty and, being from a poor family, could not afford an effective legal team to represent her. Teodora’s is one case among many.

1998 was a watershed moment for women’s human rights in El Salvador. This was the year that the government decided to take a regressive step. While most countries around the world were moving towards reforming restrictive laws on abortion, El Salvador moved to criminalize abortion in all circumstances. Legislation that had previously allowed access to abortion in certain circumstances – namely, when the woman’s life was in danger, when the pregnancy was the result of rape or incest, or in cases of severe fetal impairment – was amended. From then on abortion was considered a crime in all circumstances, without exception.

Amnesty International documented the grave impact of the total ban on abortion on women and girls, including the resulting human rights violations, in its report, “On the brink of death: Violence against women and the abortion ban in El Salvador, published in 2014.” In addition, many international human rights entities have publicly expressed
their concerns about the total ban on abortion, including the UN Human Rights Committee and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

The legal framework in El Salvador criminalizes every woman who undergoes an induced termination of her pregnancy, and it also creates an atmosphere of suspicion around women who are not receiving medical care when they miscarry or experience other obstetric emergencies. As a result, women who experience complications during pregnancy have been prosecuted on charges of abortion, but ultimately most have even charged with the crime of aggravated homicide. Women and girls living in poverty and receiving inadequate medical care are especially vulnerable in this regard.

Teodora has already spent over eight years in jail. She is now applying for her sentence to be commuted. We urge you to help ensure that Teodora del Carmen Vásquez is immediately released. We also urge you to help ensure the release all other women incarcerated in El Salvador for pregnancy-related complications.

Yours Sincerely,

The Board of Directors of Amnesty International USA
Sincerely,

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