“We are many, and we will not rest until there are no more femicides, until the decriminalization of abortion is not just a dream.”

-J, youth activist on women’s and girls’ rights

EL SALVADOR’S TOTAL ABORTION BAN KILLS WOMEN AND GIRLS

ACTIVIST TOOLKIT

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL
INTRODUCTION

Every year, thousands of women and girls are denied their human rights by El Salvador's total ban on abortion and the criminalization of abortion. The Salvadoran government is ultimately responsible for the deaths of women and girls denied this option and for thousands whose human rights have been violated as a result of the country's total ban on abortion.

Women and girls are held to rigid gender stereotypes and expectations, which characterize them primarily as mothers and child-bearers. Harmful stereotypes such as these prevent women from accessing already limited comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services and information.

El Salvador’s total ban on abortion includes pregnancies that pose a serious risk to the life of the mother. In these cases, women are denied an essential medical procedure. In cases where pregnancy is the result of rape or incest, the violence of their sexual assault is compounded by state violence denying them access to legal abortion. In both these circumstances, the abortion ban forces women to endure prolonged pain and trauma. Young, poor, single, and uneducated girls are most vulnerable, both to sexual trauma and to complications during pregnancy and thus suffer disproportionately from the total abortion ban.

Laws that totally ban abortion do not, in fact, decrease abortion rates. Rather, they drive women and girls to seek unsafe, clandestine abortions, the third largest cause of maternal mortality worldwide. Not only does the ban drive women to risk dangerous procedures that put them at risk of immediate and long-lasting health detriments, but fear of being reported and imprisoned also keeps women and girls from accessing vital care when and if complications do arise.

The banning of all abortion has led to the imprisonment of women. Not only have they been criminalized for exercising their basic human rights, they have even been imprisoned based on suspicion, faulty evidence, and unlawful trials.

These restrictions are serious violations of the human rights of women and girls and must be dealt with as a matter of urgency. That's why Amnesty International is highlighting the total abortion ban in El Salvador as part of the My Body, My Rights Campaign. Join us!
Breaking it Down

Key Facts and Stats:

- El Salvador’s total abortion ban is killing women and girls and destroying the lives of others. In 2011, the WHO found that 11% of women and girls who sought an illegal abortion in El Salvador died as a result.

- Women in El Salvador face jail sentences of up to 50 years if suspected of having an abortion.

- Unsafe, clandestine abortions are happening every day in El Salvador and involve a severe and very real risk of harm or death to the woman.

- Amnesty International is calling on the government of El Salvador to decriminalize abortion on all counts and provide women and girls with access to safe and legal abortion services when the pregnancy is a risk to their lives or health, or when the pregnancy is a result of rape.

- Women who miscarry naturally are also at risk of prosecution if they are suspected of actively terminating their pregnancy.

- El Salvador is lagging behind other countries in the region. It is one of just seven countries in Latin America and the Caribbean that still ban abortion in all cases. The others are Nicaragua, Chile, Dominican Republic, Haiti and Honduras, though Chile is taking steps to rectify its law.

- Worldwide, if we don’t decriminalize abortion, an estimated 220 million unsafe abortions will take place in the ten years, which can lead to injury and death.
Breaking it Down

Human Rights at Issue

- Criminalization of abortion even in cases of rape, incest or the health/life of mother
- Criminalization of women suffering miscarriages
- Insufficient evidence and unfair trials leading to imprisonment; women denied due process in court
- Lack of access to healthcare, information, and education
- Rape survivors forced to endure more violence

Recommendations for Action

Ensure access to safe and legal abortion

- Repeal laws which criminalize abortion
- Ensure access to abortion both in law and in practice, at a minimum, in cases where pregnancy poses a risk to the life of a pregnant woman or girl, and in cases where the pregnancy is the result of rape or incest
- Ensure that all laws and practices establish the duty of health providers to respect patient confidentiality

End imprisonment of women in connection with pregnancy-related issues

- Immediately and unconditionally release all women and girls who have been imprisoned in relation to undergoing abortions or for having miscarriages
- Drop charges against women and girls whose cases are pending trial in relation to undergoing an abortion or having a miscarriage
- When considering the pardon petition submitted by the human rights group Agrupacion Ciudadana in relation to women imprisoned for other pregnancy-related issues, assess if convictions were a result of mishandled evidence or unfair proceedings

Guarantee access to modern contraceptive information and services

- Ensure that all women and girls can access the full range of modern methods of contraceptive information and services
- Provide comprehensive, accurate, and non-discriminatory sexuality education both inside and outside the formal education system
What Can I Do?

- Collect signatures for the petition to President Sánchez Cerén demanding El Salvador decriminalize abortion; collect signatures on the petition to US Ambassador to the UN Samantha Power to ensure that sexual and reproductive rights are central to the post-2015 UN agenda (petitions in toolkit)

- Tell world leaders to make Sexual and Reproductive Health a priority: sign the International Planned Parenthood Federation’s online petition calling on Ambassador to Power to encourage all world leaders to support a woman’s right to make her own decisions about her own body

- Take action online: http://amnestyusa.org/RememberBeatrix-- then share the link!

- Take and upload pictures of yourself and your friends holding our Salvadoran-style signs (found at the end of the toolkit) to Amnesty’s Flickr page

- Design your own My Body, My Rights posters and hang them prominently on campus, in your apartment, or, with permission, at a local café

- Use the “What Happens Next” and “Which Of These is True” infographic quizzes (found at the end of the toolkit) at a tabling event, and give candy for right answers

- Host a country-specific dinner party! Use it as an opportunity to learn more about the El Salvador and the SRHR issues at stake.

- Hold a maternal mortality Candlelight Vigil
END THE BAN ON ABORTION IN EL SALVADOR

President Sánchez Cerén-

Every year, thousands of women and girls are denied their human rights by El Salvador’s total ban on abortion. The Salvadoran government is ultimately responsible for the resulting deaths of women and girls, and for the thousands whose human rights have been violated by the ban.

The ban makes it a crime for women and girls to have an abortion, and for anyone to help them have one.

Under the abortion ban, women and girls found guilty of terminating their pregnancies face jail sentences of up to eight years. Those who have miscarriages may be charged with aggravated homicide and jailed for up to 50 years, because they too are suspected of having clandestine abortions. Convictions are often based on weak evidence, following flawed trials.

The effects of the ban are nothing less than institutionalized violence against women and girls, and amount to torture — a conclusion backed by the UN.

El Salvador’s total ban on abortion is a serious human rights violation and must be urgently repealed. I urge you to:

- Decriminalize abortion: eliminate all punitive measures for women and girls seeking an abortion, as well as for the health care providers and others who help them to have one.
- Immediately and unconditionally release all women and girls who have been imprisoned for having abortions or miscarriages. This includes those convicted of abortion, homicide and aggravated homicide.
- Ensure access to safe and legal abortion for all women and girls. As a minimum, ensure access in cases of rape or incest, where the woman’s health or life is at risk, and where the foetus is unlikely to survive.
- Guarantee access to modern contraceptive information and services, and provide comprehensive sexuality education.

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Send to: Women’s Human Rights Coordination Group, Amnesty International USA, 600 Pennsylvania Ave SE, Washington, DC 20003
Dear Ambassador Power,

I’m calling on you to be a leading advocate for women’s sexual and reproductive health and rights at the United Nations General Assembly. The post-2015 agenda must affirm a woman’s right to make her own decisions about her body, her health, and her future. Despite signs of progress—like a 50% reduction in maternal deaths in the last 20 years—more attention is needed by governments to fulfill their obligations to women.

In the last two decades, a million women and girls have died—and more than 100 million have suffered injuries—due to complications from unsafe abortions. And today, at least 200 million women worldwide want, but cannot access, contraception.

I urge you to be a leader in ensuring that women’s sexual and reproductive health and rights – including family planning and safe, legal abortion – are not just present but prioritized in the post-2015 agenda, particularly in the areas of health, gender equality, poverty eradication, and education.

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More Resources

- Learn more about the situation in El Salvador in our issue report
- Learn more about Sexual and Reproductive Rights
- Get more ideas on how to act from Amnesty’s My Body My Rights campaign
- Explore Amnesty’s Human Rights Now Blog, particularly this article on Salvadoran women in prison for miscarriages
- Join the 16 Days Against Gender-Based Violence Campaign—find out more at www.amnestyusa.org/16days (check back for updates)
- Join the Women’s Human Rights Action Network. Sign up at: http://eepurl.com/lCr3H
- See the images included at the end of the toolkit. For Spanish materials or with any questions, email the AIUSA Women’s Coordination Group at WHR@aiusa.org

Stay connected!
- Facebook: Amnesty International USA Women’s Human Rights Network
- Twitter: @AmnestyWomenRts
MI CUERPO,
¡MIS DERECHOS!
AIUSA
MY BODY,
MY RIGHTS!
AIUSA
FOR ALL THE BEATRIZES: MY BODY, MY RIGHTS!
EL SALVADOR’S TOTAL ABORTION BAN KILLS WOMEN AND GIRLS
Which of these is true?

In El Salvador you could be jailed for...

a. 2-8 years for having an abortion
b. 6-12 years if you’re a doctor or nurse assisting an abortion
c. 30-50 years for homicide if you have a miscarriage

Answer: All of them
You live in El Salvador. You have a miscarriage. What happens next?

a. Your doctor gives you the treatment you need.
b. Your family and friends help you recover.
c. You wake up handcuffed to your hospital bed.
d. You wake up handcuffed to your hospital bed, facing a 50-year jail sentence.

Answer: d
ABORTION SAVES LIVES