

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL USA GROUP 11

PRIORITY ACTION

RADIO INTERVIEW PROVIDES OPPORTUNITY FOR IMPACT

On July 9, 2017 Amnesty International USA Group 11 member Jeremy Barth and Amnesty International USA's Advocacy Director for the Americas, Marselha Gonçalves conducted an interview on the Spanish-language ESPN Deportes radio network about the case of **Teodora del Carmen Vásquez**. That broadcast can be heard here <http://aiusagroup11.org/teodora-del-carmen-vasquez>. The broadcast informs the public and raises awareness. However, part of the power of Amnesty's activism is based in the sensitivity that many governments have for bad press about human rights practices in their country. Therefore, making the Salvadoran government aware of the bad press, and leveraging that bad press as a direct action targeting Salvadoran officials, can exploit their concerns about adverse media. This broadcast/recording, therefore, provides a unique opportunity for Amnesty activists to express our deep concerns about El Salvador's policies about abortion and the case of Teodora del Carmen Vásquez.

BACKGROUND

On 13 July 2007, Teodora was at work when she began experiencing a significant amount of pain, and asked her employer for an advance on her salary in order to be able to go to the hospital. Later that day, as the pain increased, she called the emergency services to ask for assistance and transportation to the hospital. While waiting for them to arrive her pain increased. She felt an urgent need to use the toilet and fell to the floor on her way to an unlit bathroom when suddenly her water broke. Teodora fainted and was unconscious when she delivered her child, who was still-born. She woke up momentarily to leave the bathroom without seeing her baby and then fainted again. The police arrived, handcuffed her and took her first to jail, and after several hours to the hospital.

Teodora's lawyer did not show up for her hearing. The judge ordered an attorney from the prosecution to represent her. He did not investigate or call witnesses. Teodora was sentenced to 30 years for aggravated assault. It is now 10 years since she had the stillbirth. She has not been free since July 13, 2013. Her now 13 year old son, who can only visit once a year, has not seen his mother out of prison since he was 3.

Unfortunately, due to El Salvador's draconian abortion laws, there are many women who face similar circumstances. In El Salvador there are no exceptions to abortion, not rape, incest or a serious risk to a woman's health or even to her life. Abortion is illegal even if the fetus has a fatal complication and will not survive outside the womb. Because women are presumed guilty many women do not seek care when they have a problem pregnancy. If these women have a miscarriage or stillbirth they face long prison sentences.

The total ban on abortion and the resulting presumption of guilt continue to destroy the lives of women and girls. On July 5, 2017, Salvadoran authorities gave a 19-year-old rape survivor, Evelyn Beatriz Hernández Cruz, a 30-year prison sentence after she suffered complications similar to those of Teodora. See the Amnesty press release at: <https://www.amnestyusa.org/press-releases/el-salvador-rape-survivor-sentenced-to-30-years-in-jail-under-extreme-anti-abortion-law/>

TAKE ACTION—4 ways make some noise about this case/issue

Social Media

Send a tweet to us @amnestyNYC11 and to [@MiSeguridad SV](#) (Mauricio Ramírez Landaverde, El Salvador's Minister of Justice and Public Security) telling the Minister of Justice and Public Security of El Salvador that you want Teodora to be freed! Use [#FreeTeodora](#) [#TeodoraLibre](#) [#AIUSA](#) [#group11](#) [#NYC](#) [#ElSalvador](#) [#AmnestyAction](#) [#humanrights](#) hashtags as much as possible

Take a selfie with a sign that says [#freeTeodora](#) and [#TeodoraLibre](#) and post on Instagram and Twitter and send to: [@MiSeguridad SV](#) @amnestyNYC11

Like and follow our Facebook page: Amnesty International Local Group 11: New York, NY

Send a letter

Noting that the broadcast/recording brought this issue to your awareness and that of other people you know, please write immediately in English, Spanish or your own language to the Salvadoran Minister of Justice:

Mauricio Ramírez Landaverde
Ministro de Justicia y Seguridad Pública,
17 Avenida Norte, Complejo Plan Maestro, Edificio B1, nivel 1,
Alamenda Juan Pablo II,
San Salvador, El Salvador

Two sample letters are attached—one for those who heard the podcast and one for those of you who did not. Letters to the Minister of Justice should call on him to take action to:

- Ensure that Teodora del Carmen Vásquez is immediately released
- Ensure that all other women incarcerated for pregnancy-related complications who have exhausted other legal remedies be released

Send an email

Tell members of the legislature that you are reading about the harsh abortion laws in El Salvador and the cruel impact on women.

Email President of the Legislative Assembly: ggallegos@asamblea.gob.sv
@GGallegos24 / President of the Commission of the Legislative Assembly:
mtenorio@asamblea.gob.sv @mtenoriosv.

Salutation Dear members of the Legislative Assembly/ Estimados/as miembros/as de la Asamblea Legislativa

Call on the Legislative Assembly to:

- Decriminalize abortion in El Salvador
- Free Teodora del Carmen Vásquez and all women imprisoned on pregnancy-related complications charges who requests pardons
- Ensure access to abortion in cases of rape or incest, where the woman's health or life is at risk, and in cases of severe and fatal fetal impairment

Get petition signatures

Sign this electronic petition and send it to your friends urging them to sign:
<https://act.amnestyusa.org/ea-action/action?ea.client.id=1839&ea.campaign.id=42763>

Increase the impact of your letter by making friends and coworkers aware of Teodora's case and getting them to sign the petition that is part of this packet. Enclose signed petitions with your letter, or send them separately.

Mauricio Ramírez Landaverde
Ministro de Justicia y Seguridad Pública,
17 Avenida Norte, Complejo Plan Maestro, Edificio B1, nivel 1,
Alamenda Juan Pablo II,
San Salvador, El Salvador

Dear Minister of Justice Ramirez Landaverde

As someone deeply concerned about human right and especially the rights of women, I was asked to listen to a radio program on July 9, 2017 that told the story of Teodora del Carmen Vásquez. Teodora had pregnancy complications that led to a still-birth at work. Though she had a, the real miscarriage appears to be a one of the injustice of her arrest. She was jailed and is currently serving a 30-year prison sentence for aggravated homicide as she was presumed guilty of having an “abortion” rather than simply suffering from complications in her pregnancy.

The interview was conducted on ESPN Deportes radio in New York City, a radio network that reaches the large and diverse Spanish-speaking community in New York City. Through a recording of the interview at <http://aiusagroup11.org/teodora-del-carmen-vasquez>, many more have listened to the story since its original broadcast. The growing awareness about this case and this issue raises our concerns for Teodora and, more generally, the health, safety, and rights of women in El Salvador.

Having heard this story and having shared it with my friends, I write you as one of many in support of Teodora del Carmen Vásquez. I have read that she has already spent 10 years in prison and has applied for her sentence to be commuted. I strongly urge you to take action that leads the immediate release of Teodora del Carmen Vásquez immediately. I further ask that you work to release all other women who have been incarcerated for pregnancy-related complications who have exhausted other legal remedies.

Sincerely,

Mauricio Ramírez Landaverde
Ministro de Justicia y Seguridad Pública,
17 Avenida Norte, Complejo Plan Maestro, Edificio B1, nivel 1,
Alamenda Juan Pablo II,
San Salvador, El Salvador

Dear Minister of Justice Ramirea Landaverde

We are concerned about Teodora del Carmen Vásquez who is currently serving a 30-year prison sentence for aggravated homicide, after suffering a still-birth at work. She was presumed guilty of having an “abortion” rather than the potential victim of pregnancy complications. One percent of pregnancies worldwide end with a stillbirth. Punishing a woman who has this unfortunate and devastating event is cruel, not only to Ms. Vásquez but to her family. Ms. Vasquez unfair prison sentence robs her son of his mother’s presence.

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. We are concerned that Ms. Vasquez’s harsh punishment will prevent pregnant women from seeking medical care. This could have devastating, far reaching effects.

Minister, I call on you to:

- Take action to ensure Teodora del Carmen Vásquez is immediately released
- Take action to release all other women incarcerated for pregnancy-related complications who have exhausted other legal remedies

Teodora has already spent over 9 years in jail. She is now applying for her sentence to be commuted. Her last hope is in your hands.

Sincerely,

