

Honduras: UN experts deplore further attacks against right to safe abortion

GENEVA (19 January 2021) – UN human rights experts* today condemned a proposed bill that would basically block any potential progress on women’s and girls’ sexual and reproductive rights in Honduras, a country where one in four girls has been pregnant at least once before reaching age 19**.

The Constitutional amendment presented by a deputy from the National Party and Vice-President of the Honduran Congress on 11 January would incorporate the absolute prohibition of abortion in article 67 of the national Constitution.

“This bill is alarming. Instead of taking a step towards fulfilling women’s and girls’ fundamental rights, the country is moving backwards,” the experts said. Honduras is one of the very few States in the world that prohibits abortion in all circumstances, including in cases of rape or incest, where the life and/or health of pregnant women is at risk and in cases of severe fetal impairment.

“The criminalisation of abortion and the obligation of medical professionals to report cases of women whose injuries appear related to unsafe abortions have led to women being incarcerated,” the experts said. These denunciations by medical professionals may also dissuade women suffering from a miscarriage or complications from abortion to seek the necessary medical attention, thereby putting their lives in danger.

“We regret that efforts to amend the Criminal Code with a view to decriminalising abortion have failed in the past and we recall that criminalising women for abortion is against international human rights standards,” the experts said, adding the influence of religious lobbies on public health matters was detrimental.

The existing law also prohibits the use, sale, distribution and purchase of emergency contraception, carrying the same imprisonment penalties as abortion.

“The lack of accessibility of contraception, particularly in rural areas, which, together with the prohibition of emergency contraception, contributes to a high rate of unwanted pregnancy, including adolescent pregnancy,” they said. Honduras has the second highest rate of adolescent pregnancy among countries in Latin America and in its rural areas, the rate of adolescent pregnancy reaches 30 per cent.

“Many early pregnancies are the result of the crimes of rape and incest,” the experts said. They also cited World Health Organization statistics that show that countries where women have the right to terminate pregnancies – and also have access to

information and to all contraceptive methods – have the lowest rate of actual terminations.

“Restrictive laws on abortion increase maternal mortality and morbidity rates due to unsafe abortions and are not effective in reducing the rate of abortion,” the experts said. The number of unsafe abortions in Honduras could be between 51,000 and 82,000 per year, they said.

As per international standards, access to safe and legal abortion services should be offered, at least, in cases of rape or incest, where the life and/or health of pregnant women is at risk and in cases of severe fetal impairment.

ENDS

***The experts:** *The [Working Group on discrimination against women and girls](#): **Elizabeth Broderick** (Chair), **Melissa Upreti** (Vice Chair), **Dorothy Estrada Tanck**, **Ivana Radačić**, and **Meskerem Geset Techane**; **Tlaleng Mofokeng**, [Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health](#); and **Dubravka Simonovic**, [Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences](#);*

***The findings and recommendations of the UN Working Group on discrimination on women’s and girls’ sexual and reproductive rights in Honduras can be found in their country visit [report](#)*