

Amnesty International

MONTHLY ACTION

ACTIVISM TEAM, Amnesty International UK
HRAC, 17-25 New Inn Yard, London EC2A 3EA



December 2015

My Body My Rights

Defend women's rights in Burkina Faso

When H el ene heard about contraception, she wanted to use it, but her husband wouldn't let her.

'My husband didn't agree, so I couldn't. Anyway, I didn't have the money. How was I going to get the money?'

H el ene is now a 25-year-old mother of four children

She managed to access some through a healthcare clinic, but her husband wouldn't give her the money to renew her contraceptive injection, so she fell pregnant again.

'It's difficult to raise the subject [of contraception] with him. He is automatically against it. When the husband speaks, we have to put up with everything... Without money, there was nothing I could do and the last child, which I did not want, was born.'

H el ene's situation is all-too-common in Burkina Faso, where women are too often unable to make decisions about their body and sexual and reproductive lives. The high cost of contraception is just one barrier for women and girls trying to make decisions about their bodies. Forced early marriage is common: most girls are married by the age of 19 (some as young as 10), and nearly half of all young women are mothers. Talking openly about sex is taboo, and it is difficult to obtain information about sexual health and contraception. In some cases a women needs permission from her husband to use contraception.

What we'd like you to do

Please write to the President of Burkina Faso using the sample letter enclosed with this action or write your own letter and urge the president du Faso to:

- Make contraception free for all women & girls in Bukina Faso;
- Improve the accessibility of sexual health information and services for women and girls;
- Guarantee their right to decide if and when to have children and if so, how many.

Please return your letters to Amnesty UK (see address on page 3) and we will deliver your letter during a visit and meetings with the government in Burkina Faso in the New Year.

CONTENTS

- Action instructions
- Background information
- Sample letter

GOT QUERIES OR WANT TO DO MORE?

If you have any queries about this action please contact:
Amnesty Country Coordinator for Burkina Faso,
Clare Frances Moran at
Clarefrances.moran@amnesty.org.uk

MONTHLY ACTION

Background info

Defend women's rights in Burkina Faso

In Burkina Faso, many young people struggle to access contraception and other sexual health services. Religious and cultural norms, gender-based discrimination, and practices such as early marriage combine with poverty to hamper women's and girls' ability to make decisions about their sexual and reproductive lives.

Talking openly about sex is taboo. Embarrassment and fear prevent many women and girls from getting reliable and confidential information about sexual health and family planning. Even if they manage to find someone they can speak to, they face discriminatory attitudes from medical professionals. In some cases, women are denied contraceptives unless they have their husband's permission. And even if that barrier is surmounted, contraceptives can be too expensive for many of them.

Amnesty International will campaign to remove discriminatory attitudes and financial barriers that block women's and girls' access to contraception and family planning. We will also campaign to improve access to information and education about these issues, and about sexual and reproductive rights.

Education cut short

Only 64% of girls in Burkina Faso are able to go to school, and many have to leave to get married or take on domestic work.

Even the most basic information of sexual and reproductive health is inaccessible to most girls. Mariama, now a 25-year-old mother of three children, did not know that she could get pregnant from having sex, for example.

Denying healthcare is deadly

The country has one of the highest rates of maternal mortality – when a woman dies as a result of her pregnancy – in the world. One in every 22 women will die simply from getting pregnant. With education and healthcare programmes in place, these deaths could be dramatically reduced.

'Sometimes I have to get into debt just to renew my contraception.'

Sofia, aged 40, sells doughnuts to make a living

Burkina Faso has one of the lowest rates of contraceptive use, with just 17% of women and girls taking measures to make decisions about their own bodies and lives. Contraceptives may not be something a girl knows about, and if they are available they can be prohibitively expensive – emergency contraception can cost one-fifth of a woman's monthly income if she earns the minimum wage. A woman who has been raped must still pay for her own emergency medical care – not an option for many women in this situation.

WANT TO DO MORE?

Take action as part of Write for Rights 2015 – Please visit:

<http://www.amnesty.org.uk/write-rights-girls-forced-marriage-burkina-faso#.Vknhl00nzc>

Président du Faso
C/o Campaigns Team
Amnesty International UK
17-25 New Inn Yard
London EC2A 3EA

Dear Président du Faso

Burkina Faso has one of the lowest rates of contraceptive use among women in the world. It also has one of the highest maternal mortality rates. By the age of 19, most girls are married and nearly half of them are mothers.

International human rights law and Burkina Faso's constitution protect gender equality. But in practice women are discriminated against and denied their rights. They are too often prevented from making decisions about their bodies, and their sexual and reproductive lives.

I urge you to improve women's and girls' access to sexual and reproductive health services and information. I also call on you to make contraception free and to ensure that women and girls have the right to decide whether to have children, and how many.

Yours sincerely,