
Amnesty International

MONTHLY ACTION

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



September 2015

My Body My Rights

STAND IN SOLIDARITY WITH WOMEN IN EL SALVADOR

The total ban on abortion in El Salvador means abortion is a crime even if the woman's life and health is at risk and if the pregnancy is the result of rape or incest. The law also means that women who miscarry or have stillbirths can be charged with murder if accused of abortion, and end up imprisoned for decades. Many of these women face sentences of more than 30 years.

This has created an atmosphere of suspicion and led to hundreds of arrests in the country. In many instances insufficient evidence and unfair trials have led to imprisonment. The law is applied so strongly that even doctors and nurses face agonising dilemmas. Many are afraid that they could lose their jobs if they don't report their patients, women who've come to them in desperate pain and distress to the authorities.

One of the women affected by this discriminating law is María Teresa Rivera who is serving a 40-year prison sentence. She was 28 years old and was working in a garment factory when one day she felt the urgent need to use the toilet. She was found by her mother-in-law, bleeding on the bathroom floor. She had not known she was pregnant. She was rushed to hospital where a member of staff reported her to the police. Police officers arrived and began questioning María Teresa without a lawyer present. She was later found guilty of aggravated homicide.

Maria is only one of hundreds of women in El Salvador that suffered complications with their pregnancies and had been convicted of committing a crime when suffering a miscarriage.

Amnesty International is campaigning to challenge this, violence against women and girls in El Salvador, including the criminalisation of abortion in all circumstances.

CONTENTS

- Action instructions
- Background information
- List of new MBMR resources
- Additional Reading

GOT QUERIES OR WANT TO DO MORE?

If you have any queries about this action please contact:
Activism@amnesty.org.uk / 020 7033 1675
Local group's monthly mailing can be downloaded from:
www.amnesty.org.uk/localgroups

MONTHLY ACTION

My Body My Rights

Take Action: Create a key of freedom for the women in El Salvador

What we'd like you to do

We'd like to show support for Maria Theresa and other women jailed after suffering complications with their pregnancies and demand their immediate release. We are asking people to write messages of support on ribbon and attach them to paper or card keys to create a key of freedom.

How to make your key of freedom

- Write your name on a colourful ribbon made of fabric. Make the ribbons 30-40 cm long and 2cm wide.
- Create a key cut out of paper or card. You can use a household key as a template. Please make the key no longer than 5 cm
- Tie the ribbon to the key

Please think about collecting additional messages at events and stalls in your local communities.

Where to send your keys

Please return your actions to Community Organiser (Local Group), Amnesty International UK, 17-25 New Inn Yard, London EC2A 3EA

Deadline: 20 October.

What will happen to your keys?

In November Amnesty El Salvador will host a week of action with a concert in San Salvador to highlight to Salvadorians and especially to young people the effect the total ban on abortion has on women and girls in the country. As part of this, Amnesty is creating a sculpture with solidarity messages that will be featured at the concert to show international solidarity. We need your keys by the 20th October to ensure we can forward them to Amnesty El Salvador in time for the concert.

Once you returned the keys with ribbons to us they will be tied to the sculpture. We will share pictures of the sculpture decked with your solidarity keys with the women in prison so that they know they are not alone. The entire art piece which is in a shape of a tree growing in a cage will then be delivered to the Minister of Justice and Public Security in El Salvador as we urge him to free all women that are imprisoned after suffering complications with their pregnancies.

New MBMR campaign materials

A new range of My Body My Rights campaign materials will be available from 1 September. To order the above items, please call 01788 545553, making sure you have the product code to hand.

MBMR campaign leaflet (featuring fold out map)
MBMR stickers
MBMR pocket guide
MBMR temporary tattoos

Product Code MBM005
Product Code MBM006
Product Code MBM013
Product Code MBM009

MONTHLY ACTION

Background Information

The total ban on termination is having a devastating effect on women and girls in El Salvador. In 2011, the World Health Organisation found that 11% of women and girls that sought an illegal abortion in El Salvador die as a result.

The restrictive laws in the country have meant that women are frequently charged with aggravated homicide when suffering complications following their pregnancies. When this happens, women who live in poverty are often less able to access a suitable legal defence and most likely to see their right to a fair trial violated. In these instances verdicts of the trials are often inevitable even if there is a lack of evidence or despite medical evidence indicating the women suffered a miscarriage. As a result women have been sentenced to up to 40 years in prison, in clear violation of their human rights.

Some women that Amnesty have spoken to have witnessed that they have not had time to recover from medical procedures and some women have reported waking up handcuffed to a hospital bed with police not medical staff at their bedside. They've had no time to see or speak to their families or children, as many of the women affected are young mothers.

Ilopango women's prison in a suburb to San Salvador is one of the prisons where women serve their sentences. Designed to hold 220 inmates, Ilopango now is home to nearly 2,000.

The living conditions here are hard and women have to sit, lie and sleep in every available square inch of space, sometimes being 40 women sharing a cell.

Most of the women who find themselves in Ilopango are young, single, poorly educated and living in poverty.

The El Salvadorian government is failing on its human rights obligations to these women, with devastating consequences. In handing down lengthy custodial sentences to mothers of young children, including following unfair trials, the Salvadoran authorities are not only violating the rights of these women, but also the rights of their children that are being left home without a mother.

Additional reading:

El Salvador Report – On the Brink of Death – violence against women and the abortion ban in El Salvador <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr29/003/2014/en/>

Watch this Space

As part of this year's Write for Rights Campaign we will take action for Teodora del Carmen Vasquez, a Salvadoran woman who has spent more than 7 years in jail for being convicted of aggravated homicide after suffering a still-birth. She was convicted and sentenced to 30 years in prison in 2008. In January 2015 the Supreme Court released an unfavourable briefing document which denied her appeal for pardon.

To take action for Thloedora go to www.amnesty.org.uk/right The Write for Rights campaign where launch on 1 November 2015.