



STAND IN SOLIDARITY WITH WOMEN IN EL SALVADOR



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Note to Youth group leaders. Due to the sensitive nature of the issues dealt with in this mailing some of the content may not be suitable for all members of your group. We recommend that an adult or older youth group member reads through the content first and makes a judgement on its suitability.

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We hope you will feel inspired to take action on all of our campaigns but remind you that all actions are optional.

This mailing is also available to download at

www.amnesty.org.uk/youth

IN A NUTSHELL

In El Salvador abortion is a crime even if the women's health is at risk or she has been raped. Many women face being put in prison for up to 40 years if they seek an abortion or even if they've just been accused of having one.

We are asking youth groups to create 'keys of freedom' containing messages of support for women currently in prison as a result of the abortion ban.

Stand in solidarity with women in El Salvador

The criminalisation of abortion in El Salvador

In El Salvador abortion is completely banned. This means that abortion is criminalised (considered to be crime) even if the woman's life and health is at risk or if the pregnancy is the result of rape. As a result women face being put in prison if they seek an abortion. 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 lack of evidence and unfair trials have led to imprisonment. 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.

Case study

One of the women affected by this law is María Teresa Rivera who is serving a 40-year prison sentence in El Salvador. She was 28 years old and was working in a garment factory when one day she felt the urgent need to use the toilet where she suffered a miscarriage. 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 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.

Further information

The total ban on abortion is having a devastating effect on women and girls in El Salvador. In 2011, the World Health Organisation (WHO) found that 11% of women and girls that sought an illegal abortion in El Salvador die as a result. Women are frequently charged with

aggravated homicide (a violent murder) when suffering complications following their pregnancies. When this happens, women who live in poverty are often less able to afford a good lawyer to represent them. They are also more likely to experience an unfair trial even if there is a lack of evidence that they have had an abortion 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 at their bedside instead of medical staff. 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 of 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 prison 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.



My Body My Rights campaign: A quick overview

The My Body My Rights (MBMR) campaign concerns sexual and reproductive rights. Being able to make our own decisions about our health, body and sexual life is a basic human right. It means you should be able to make your own decisions about your body and:

- get accurate information about these issues
- access sexual and reproductive health services including contraception
- choose, if, when and who to marry
- decide if you want to have children and how many

They also mean our lives should be free from all forms of sexual violence, including rape and forced abortion or pregnancy.

Amnesty is campaigning to make sure we all have control over our sexual and reproductive choices.

You can find out more information about the campaign here:

<http://www.amnesty.org.uk/issues/my-body-my-rights>

Take Action:

Create a key of freedom for 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 from paper or card. You can use a household key as a template. Please make the key no longer than 5 cm (otherwise they may be too heavy to send).
- ✦ 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 Anne Montague (Community Organiser – Youth), 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.

Campaign materials

My Body My Rights (MBMR) campaign materials will be available from 1 September.

MBMR campaign leaflet (featuring fold out map)	Product Code MBM005
MBMR stickers	Product Code MBM006
MBMR pocket guide	Product Code MBM013
MBMR temporary tattoos	Product Code MBM009

These campaigning resources are available to order from our mailing house from 1 September. To place an order please call TFS on **01788 545 553**.

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 will launch on 1 November.

Help and Advice

If you feel you need to discuss issues related to this campaign further here are some organisations that can help:

CHILDLINE
0800 1111
www.childline.org.uk

NSPCC
0808 800 500
www.nspcc.co.uk