



MEP's name and address

London, Thursday 5 May, 2016

Dear Mr/Ms/Mrs Name,

CAWN

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With reason of the next meeting of the Standing Parliamentary committees from the Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly on 16-18 May in Lisbon, and in your role as member of the Delegation to the Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly, the Central America Women's Network (CAWN) and Women in Development Europe (WIDE+) would like to ask you to pressure El Salvador to have an open debate in its Legislative Assembly to change the legislation that bans abortion under all circumstances.

- Human rights groups in El Salvador agree that **a debate on the inadequacies of the abortion law** in the Legislative Assembly **is key for the advance of women's reproductive rights** in the country and the rest of the region
- In the current climate of the **Zika virus**, the need to change the current legislation to allow women control over their own reproductive life has become even more pressing. The **high maternal mortality rate** caused by unsafe abortions in El Salvador could now potentially skyrocket.
- The EU must act in line with the objectives of the new **framework for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment through EU external relations** for the period 2016-2020, particularly on the goal of empowering women to have control over their sexual and reproductive life
- Your commitment to raise these issues and to **make the government of El Salvador accountable for the situation women face** is crucial in order to make sure your Central American counterparts note the importance of holding such debate in the Legislative Assembly of El Salvador

In El Salvador abortion is banned including when pregnancy is the result of rape, is non-viable, or when it is necessary in order to save a woman's life. Medical professionals face penalties for any involvement and are obliged to report suspected abortions, while access to reproductive health services and contraception is limited.

Under the heavy criminalisation of abortion, women who terminate their pregnancies are condemned to serve jail sentences for aggravated homicide, for up to 40 years in prison. Many women from disadvantaged backgrounds who have suffered obstetric complications, miscarriage or stillbirth **have seen their right to due process violated** and have been condemned under this same law. The Salvadoran Citizen Group for the Decriminalisation of Therapeutic and Ethical Abortion - ACDATEE - reports that over 129 women were imprisoned for abortion between 2000 and 2011, and more than 26 have been prosecuted for aggravated homicide following a miscarriage, stillbirth or obstetric complications.

In addition to this, the **World Health Organisation has recently declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern**, caused by the increasing outbreaks of the Zika virus. The focus of the health concerns is pregnant women, but unrealistic recommendations made by the Salvadoran government, calling on women to avoid pregnancy for the next two years, **ignore the limited control women have over their own reproductive life and the sexual violence that many women suffer**, which also leads to unplanned pregnancies.

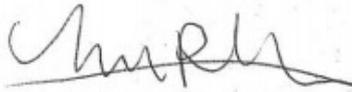
We urge you to raise these issues during the relevant meetings of the next EuroLat session if you are attending them, such as:

- 16 May: Meeting of the Euro-Latin American Women's Forum;
- 17 May: Meeting of the Committee of Political Affairs, Security and Human Rights;
- 18 May: Meeting of the Delegation of the Central American Parliament with the European Parliament Delegation for relations with the Countries of Central America.

If you were not attending any of these meetings, we would like you to be so kind to direct us to your fellow MEPs present in Lisbon during these days.

We look forward to hearing your response to this matter, and we are happy to provide you with more information if requested.

Yours sincerely,



Margarita Rebolledo Hernández, Coordinator
Central America Women's Network

Virginia López Calvo, Board member
Women in Development Europe+

Attached to this message you will find two publications by CAWN on the reality faced by women in El Salvador in the subject of reproductive rights.