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DECISION WOULD SAVE LIVES OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN HONDURAS

This week, politicians have the opportunity to make a tremendous advance in favour of girls and women in Honduras. In finalizing the first penal code in 33 years for the country, a committee of politicians will debate this legal instrument and and have the ability to decriminalize the interruption of a pregnancy in three exceptional circumstances:

- If a woman’s life is in danger;
- In cases of rape or incest; and,
- If the fetus has no possibility of life outside the womb.

According to an opinion poll conducted by the firm Le Vote, 62 per cent of Hondurans support decriminalization under these three circumstances. This long-overdue update of the penal code is urgently needed: Honduras is one of the seven countries in the world in which the interruption of a pregnancy is completely prohibited. The United Nations equates a total ban of this kind with torture.

Currently, a woman with cancer cannot interrupt a pregnancy even to access life-saving treatment. A 10-year-old rape victim must risk her life to give birth. When a woman learns her fetus will die at birth, she must finish the pregnancy and risk physical and emotional trauma.

The Somos Muchas (We Are Many) Collective developed the proposal that seeks to change this reality. Somos Muchas is a platform made up of over 20 organizations in Honduras, as well as independent female and feminist activists, that supports the life and liberty of women. Religious leaders, legal and medical professionals, sexual diversity activists and sex trade workers’ rights groups are among the members.

Somos Muchas operates in a country with high rates of poverty, violence and impunity: in 2015 in Honduras, there were 2,200 reports of sexual violence; each year, over 900 girls between the ages of 10 and 14 are pregnant by rape. Perpetrators are rarely found guilty. Of all maternal deaths that occur every year in Honduras, at least 20 per cent could be avoided were abortion decriminalized to protect a woman’s health.

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