

URGENT ACTION

CONGRESS REJECTS REGRESSIVE ABORTION REFORM

On 11 July, the Chamber of Deputies of the Dominican Congress voted to reject proposed reforms to the Criminal Code that failed to decriminalize abortion in limited circumstances and continued to violate the rights of women and girls. As a result, the proposed reforms cannot be made into law during the current legislative period.

In December 2016, President Danilo Medina vetoed a new version of the Dominican Republic's Criminal Code, previously approved by Congress, that maintained the country's complete ban on abortion with one exception: when the pregnancy poses a risk to life of the woman, and only after "all attempts had been made to save both the lives of the woman and the foetus."

With his veto, the President submitted "observations" (recommendations) that the Criminal Code stipulate three specific exceptions to the criminalization of abortion: when a pregnancy poses a risk to the life of the woman or girl, when a pregnancy is the result of rape or incest, and in cases when the foetus will not survive outside the womb.

On 31 May 2017 the Dominican Senate (upper chamber of the Dominican Congress) voted to reject the President's recommendations. The recommendations were then sent to the Justice Commission of the Chamber of Deputies (lower chamber of the Congress) for review, which presented a report to the Chamber also recommending the rejection of the Presidential observations. However, the Chamber voted on 11 July to reject the Justice Commission's report by 84 votes to 63 (with 14 abstentions).

As a result of the Chamber's vote, the proposed reforms to the Criminal Code rejecting the decriminalization of abortion cannot be passed during this legislative period. In the short term, this means that the country's current Criminal Code, which dates back to 1884 and maintains a complete ban on abortion, will continue to be in effect. However, it also leaves the door open for the proposed reforms to the Criminal Code to be adopted during future legislative periods so that they include the three exceptions to the criminalization of abortion promulgated in the presidential observations. If the presidential recommendations are included in future reforms to the Criminal Code, then the Dominican Republic will take a large step forward towards guaranteeing the rights to life and health of women and girls.

No further action is required of the UA network for the time being. We will continue to monitor the situation and request further action when necessary. Many thanks to all those who have sent appeals.

This is the seventh update of UA 151/16. Further information: www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr27/6573/2017/en/

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