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Morocco: Royal initiative on abortion offers unique opportunity to recognize women's rights

The decision to produce a draft bill aimed at reforming the abortion law in Morocco, announced by King Mohammed VI on 16 March 2015, represents a unique opportunity to decriminalize abortion. Currently, criminalization forces Moroccan women to resort to illegal and unsafe abortions, said Amnesty International. In a [submission](#) published today, the organization calls on the Moroccan authorities to seize this historic opportunity to decriminalize abortion and thus improve the situation of women and young girls in Morocco by allowing them access to safe and legal abortions.

Although Morocco's Criminal Code permits abortion when a doctor or surgeon considers that a pregnant woman's health is at risk, and provided the consent of her spouse has been obtained (Article 453), prison sentences and fines are prescribed for any abortion or attempted abortion that takes place outside of this legal framework (Articles 449-452; 454-458). Speeches or writings that encourage abortion are also punishable with a prison sentence (Article 455).

The relevant UN human rights treaties (to which Morocco is a signatory) have all concluded that laws criminalizing abortion are a violation of the dignity and autonomy of women and girls. These laws lead them to resort to illegal abortions, placing their health and lives in danger, and running the risk of imprisonment.

The time has come for the Moroccan authorities to bring current legislation into line with the reality of illegal abortion and to fulfil the country's international human rights obligations.

Amnesty International is therefore calling on the Moroccan authorities to decriminalize abortion and ensure access to safe and legal abortions, particularly in cases where the life, physical or mental health of a pregnant woman is in danger, in cases of rape or incest, and in certain cases of severe or fatal foetal impairment.

Amnesty International is also calling on the Moroccan authorities to provide comprehensive access to contraception and to sexual and reproductive health care, to ensure access to appropriate care for women suffering medical complications following an abortion (legal or not) and to remove the requirement for spousal consent, which is a violation of a woman's right to autonomy.

Background

On 8 March 2014, Amnesty International launched a global campaign entitled *My Body, My Rights*. The campaign calls on governments to recognize the right of women and girls to physical integrity and to a life free from sexual violence. These are universal human rights, recognized in international law as sexual and reproductive rights, and States must ensure that they are respected, protected and fulfilled.

In the context of this campaign, Amnesty International launched a petition calling on the Algerian, Moroccan and Tunisian authorities to reform legislative provisions that do not protect the victims of sexual violence adequately, to adopt a comprehensive legislative and regulatory framework to combat sexual violence and to take measures to facilitate victims' access to legal remedy and appropriate medical support, including access to emergency contraception and the possibility of a safe and legal abortion.

By the time it closed in September 2014, the petition had been signed by 198,128 of Amnesty

International's members and supporters.

Public document

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