



WOMEN'S LIVES CUT SHORT STOP MATERNAL MORTALITY

Across Africa thousands of women each year die during pregnancy and childbirth. Their lives could be saved if they had access to quality, affordable and timely health care. Government neglect and discrimination are violating women's rights to life and health on a massive scale. These photos show Amnesty International's campaign to reduce maternal mortality in two West African Countries, Sierra Leone and Burkina Faso.

Sierra Leone has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world. The costs of seeking health care (and the fear of those costs) are a major factor. Many pregnant women do not obtain life-saving treatment because their families simply cannot afford the costs.

An Amnesty International campaign Caravan travelled all over Sierra Leone in September 2009 to raise awareness that health is a human right. The Caravan travelled for 12 days across Sierra Leone, spreading the message that maternal health care is a human right and should be a priority for the government, donors and communities. Wherever the Caravan stopped, activists organized plays, film shows, radio programmes, community meetings and concerts to raise awareness about the issues leading to high maternal death rates. On 27 April 2010, the government of Sierra Leone, supported by donors, announced a policy to make health care free for pregnant women, new mothers and young children.

Every year, more than 2,000 women die in Burkina Faso when pregnant or while giving birth. The vast majority die because they cannot access adequate health care or because they have not been able to make decisions about whether and when to have children. Pregnant women in Burkina Faso face long and difficult journeys to health facilities, as well as corrupt practices by some medical personnel who are not properly monitored or held accountable. Many die because of shortages – of blood, drugs, equipment or qualified medical staff.

The Amnesty International campaign Caravan toured Burkina Faso in January 2010 to stimulate awareness and debate and to collect signatures and voices for a petition to the Minister of Health. In each location, Amnesty International Burkina Faso and its partner organizations held meetings with women, local officials, health professionals and students. They took part in radio programmes, showed a film and staged a play. In February, the President of Burkina Faso expressed his support for the removal of financial barriers to emergency obstetric care for all women.

