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## **Dominican Republic: Parliament must decriminalize abortion**

Parliamentarians in the Dominican Republic must take advantage of an ongoing debate around the current Penal Code and decriminalize abortion, Amnesty International said ahead of a vote on Wednesday.

Article 90 of the Penal Code envisages criminal penalties for women who seek an abortion and for those who provide it or help provide it – regardless of the circumstances, including if the pregnancy was the result of rape or incest or if the life of the women is endangered by carrying on with the pregnancy.

“The proposed penal code flies in the face of women’s and girls’ human rights and maintains a situation in which health professionals are prevented from providing the best care for their patients,” said Javier Zúñiga, Special Advisor at Amnesty International.

“The criminalization of abortion in all circumstances, as maintained in the new legislation, violates women’s rights to life, health and not to suffer torture or ill treatment and discrimination and it goes against international human rights commitments made by the Dominican Republic.”

According to the World Health Organization, the Dominican Republic has a high rate of maternal mortality. Some of these deaths are a result of unsafe abortions.

In August 2012, Rosaura, a 16-year-old girl with leukaemia died of complications caused by a miscarriage. She had been diagnosed as suffering from leukaemia in early July that year, when she was a few weeks pregnant. At that time, she was prevented from having a therapeutic abortion – as recommended by various health professionals – because it was against the law. Chemotherapy was also delayed as doctors were concerned it would harm the foetus.

“Evidence shows that when abortion is totally banned, the rates of maternal mortality grow because doctors are unable or fearful of providing life-saving treatment that has health impacts for the pregnancy, even when it’s the only way to save the patient,” said Javier Zúñiga.

“Any serious efforts by the Dominican Republic to tackle the high rates of maternal mortality needs to include measures to ensure women do not die because of unsafe abortions.”

“What parliamentarians in the Dominican Republic should do is to listen to the demands of large parts of Dominican civil society effectively to protect the rights of women and girls. This includes decriminalizing abortion, protecting women and girls from gender-based violence, ensuring access to information to prevent unwanted pregnancies, as well as ensuring justice for those who suffered abuse.”