

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PRESS RELEASE

Index: PRE 01/527/2011  
14 October 2011

### **ASEAN: End discrimination against women to improve maternal health**

ASEAN must take urgent action if all of its member states are to meet targets under the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) for addressing poor sexual and reproductive health for women and girls, Amnesty International said today in a new briefing paper.

The publication *Making the fair choice: Key steps to improve maternal health in ASEAN*, based on case studies in Indonesia and the Philippines, comes as ASEAN's Intergovernmental Human Rights Commission meets in Manila to discuss how to improve maternal health in the 10-nation region.

"It is very disappointing that some ASEAN countries are at risk of failing to meet pledges on maternal mortality which they committed to just a year ago," said Aurora Parong, Director of Amnesty International Philippines.

"This is an opportunity for ASEAN to ensure none of its member states lag behind where women's lives are concerned. Globally, one of the clearest manifestations of discrimination against women and girls is the high number of preventable maternal deaths."

Amnesty International called on ASEAN states to remove barriers to women and girls' sexual and reproductive health which put their lives at risk, in particular discriminatory laws and policies, and attitudes and practices amongst health workers.

In 2010, ASEAN states pledged to provide improved access to sexual and reproductive health services and safe family planning methods.

The Philippines is unlikely to meet its MDG target of reducing maternal mortality from 94 to 52 per 100,000 live births by 2015. Access to contraception is limited, and "natural", unreliable family planning methods, including withdrawal, are publicly encouraged over other methods.

For every 100,000 live births in Indonesia, 228 women lose their lives. The Indonesian government admitted in 2010 that it would not achieve its MDG target of reducing maternal mortality to 102 deaths per 100,000 live births by 2015.

In Indonesia, access to sexual and reproductive health services is severely restricted in law and practice. Many contraceptive procedures or treatments require a husband's permission, which denies access for unmarried women and girls' altogether, and restricts it for married ones.

Abortion is criminalized in most cases in Indonesia and in all circumstances in the Philippines.

"It is appalling that women face so many obstacles to exercising their rights. Limiting access to contraception leads to unwanted pregnancies and contributes to tens of thousands of cases of clandestine and unsafe abortions, which pose the gravest risk to women's health," said Aurora Parong.

The Philippine government is currently discussing a Reproductive Health bill, first tabled in 1999, which aims to improve information and access to sexual, reproductive and maternal health services.

It also commits to prioritising access to healthcare for women and children living in poverty.

“The time for talk and empty policy declarations is over. Countries across ASEAN must commit to not only enacting, but implementing legislation.” said Aurora Parong.

“They must review discriminatory laws and policies, and educate health workers and communities to effect a change in attitudes towards women and girls.

Only then can we begin to see real improvement in maternal mortality rates and in women’s sexual and reproductive health across ASEAN.”

## **Background**

*Making the fair choice: Key steps to improve maternal health in ASEAN* is a briefing based on Amnesty International’s research as part of a worldwide campaign to Demand Dignity, within which maternal health and sexual and reproductive rights of women and girls feature prominently.

In 2010, Amnesty International published the report *Left without a choice: Barriers to reproductive health in Indonesia*. The report highlights multiple barriers faced by women and girls to enjoying their sexual and reproductive rights in Indonesia.

## **Notes to Editors**

For a copy of the briefing or more information please contact Amnesty International’s Asia-Pacific press officer Katya Nasim:

[katya.nasim@amnesty.org](mailto:katya.nasim@amnesty.org) + 44 207 413 5871 / + 44 (0) 7904 398 103

## **For comment please contact our spokespeople:**

In the Philippines:

Director of Amnesty International Philippines, Aurora Parong on 00 63 917 529 9953

In Indonesia:

Amnesty International’s Indonesia Campaigner Josef Benedict 00 6010 437 6376

In London:

Senior Research Advisor, Isabelle Arradon on 00 44 780 489 1637