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El Salvador must save young pregnant woman's life

The Salvadoran authorities must urgently comply with a sentence issued by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights this Monday, by providing a seriously ill pregnant woman with vital medical treatment within 72 hours.

Beatriz, a 22-year-old woman, is four-and-a-half months pregnant and has been diagnosed with a number of severe illnesses, including lupus and kidney disease. Doctors have also confirmed that the foetus she is carrying is missing a large part of its brain and skull, which means it is expected to die before it is born, or within a few hours or days after birth.

The doctors have also stated that Beatriz could die if she continues with the pregnancy, but they have not provided her with the treatment she needs as they fear that if they interrupt the pregnancy they could be prosecuted under the strict laws which criminalize abortion in the country.

"Beatriz's life is hanging in the balance because of unjustifiable delays on behalf of the authorities," said Esther Major, Amnesty International's researcher on Central America.

"The Salvadoran authorities must comply with the Inter-American Commission's recommendations and allow Beatriz to live and to care for her one-year-old son. Beatriz's life is in their hands."

On 22 March, the health professionals treating Beatriz requested permission from the Salvadoran authorities to carry out the abortion necessary to safeguard her health and life. They also asked for a guarantee that the doctors treating her would not be prosecuted under the country's strict laws, which prohibit abortion in all circumstances.

When the authorities failed to respond, Beatriz's lawyers took the request to the country's Supreme Court. The Court has still not issued a decision, despite the urgency of the case and the fact that she is currently suffering cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment.

El Salvador's Penal Code establishes that any person who requests or carries out an abortion could receive a long prison sentence. This means that both the doctors and Beatriz herself could risk imprisonment if the pregnancy was interrupted without permission from the authorities.