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El Salvador: After Beatriz, no more women must suffer discrimination and torture

No woman should be denied lifesaving medical treatment – included abortion if necessary –, Amnesty International said after the Salvadoran authorities waited for weeks before taking action to save the life of a seriously ill pregnant woman.

The life of “Beatriz” is no longer at risk after El Salvador’s government on Monday finally administered an early caesarean section to stop her from dying because of complications posed by a non-viable pregnancy and serious illness.

Beatriz – whose case has galvanized activists around the world – was made to suffer for weeks on end while El Salvador’s courts and officials debated whether to treat her.

“We wish Beatriz a speedy and full recovery after this harrowing and unnecessarily drawn-out experience,” said Esther Major, Amnesty International’s researcher on El Salvador.

“At the same time, we want to clearly state that no woman or girl should experience the kind of discrimination and torture Beatriz went through when she was fighting for her life while being denied access to life saving and health preserving abortion services.”

“Every woman – in El Salvador or anywhere else in the world – should be allowed access to lifesaving medical treatment when they need it, the organization said.

“The Salvadoran government must immediately take action to end the total ban on abortion and bring its legislation into line with international human rights standards. Laws must not tie the hands of doctors, or prevent women and girls from accessing a treatment which is necessary, as in this case, to save their lives or health,” said Major.

“This appalling situation should never have occurred. It was an act of unimaginable cruelty for the Salvadoran government to have toyed with her life and health this way. For over two months, Beatriz has waited in anguish and ill-health, not knowing if she would survive another day of the pregnancy. It is hard to believe that she was forced to campaign to save her own life and health. We are humbled by Beatriz’s bravery in the face of this cruelty,” she added.

Beatriz was not alone. Alongside the Agrupación Ciudadana, who worked tirelessly on her behalf, were hundreds of thousands of people across the world who added their voices to the call for her human rights to be upheld, many of them responding to the different appeals made by Amnesty international offices all over the world.

Background information

Beatriz is currently recovering in hospital. The 22-year-old – who was already the mother of a young son – suffers from a number of severe illnesses including lupus and kidney problems, which meant that continuing the non-viable anencephalic pregnancy posed a serious threat to her life and health. Doctors said Beatriz could die if she continued with the pregnancy but did not treat her for fear of being prosecuted under the country’s total ban on abortion.

As predicted by doctors, the foetus survived just a few hours after being born without large parts of its head and brain.