



United Nations Human Rights Council, 32nd Session (13 June – 1 July 2016)

Item 6; UPR: Paraguay

Thursday 23 June 2016

Speaker: BHA representative, Cordelia Tucker O’Sullivan

Thank you, Mr. President.

While we welcome the efforts made by Paraguay to protect and promote the rights of women, including the establishment of the Ministry of Women, we remain gravely concerned about the highly restrictive, punitive abortion laws which seriously undermine the sexual and reproductive health rights of women and girls in the territory.

[In Paraguay] Abortion is permitted only for the purpose of saving the life of the woman, and is punishable by 15-30 months if a woman causes or consents to her own abortion, even in cases of rape, incest, fatal foetal abnormality, or when the mental or physical health of the mother is at risk [where the risk does not involve a threat to life].¹ While the incidence of maternal death has decreased over the past two decades, the maternal mortality ratio remains high, estimated at around 132 deaths per 100,000 live births.²

The practical implications of the ban is truly appalling, especially for the country’s young women and girls. According to official statistics released by the Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare, in 2014 an estimated 20,000 adolescents gave birth, of which 684 were between the ages of 10 and 14,³ which, in a country with a population of around 6.8 million amounts to around 63 per 1000 babies being born to girls aged between 15 and 19.⁴

A particularly horrifying case is that of a 10 year old girl who became pregnant after being repeatedly raped, allegedly by her step father, and was subsequently denied an abortion, despite worries that her body was not yet developed enough to accommodate a foetus in its final stage.⁵ She reportedly gave birth in August of last year, by caesarean section, at the age of just 11. While both mother and child were reported to be in good health, ‘only time will tell the true extent of the physical and psychological consequences of her tragic ordeal’.⁶

We urge Paraguay to reconsider its opposition to relaxing its abortion laws, and bring its laws and policies in line with their human rights obligations as laid out in CEDAW, the ICCPR, and other relevant conventions.

Thank you.

¹ <http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/abortion/doc/paraguay.doc>

² <http://apps.who.int/gho/data/node.main.MATMORT?lang=en>

³ <http://www.abc.com.py/edicion-impresajudiciales-y-policiales/mas-de-680-ninas-con-edades-de-10-a-14-anos-dieron-a-luz-el-ano-pasado-1361649.html>

⁴ <http://apps.who.int/gho/data/node.main.REPADO39?lang=en>

⁵ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/28/paraguay-abortion-child-rape-protest>

⁶ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/08/11-year-old-rape-survivor-gives-birth-as-paraguay-upholds-draconian-anti-abortion-law/>