



Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'Homme

ORGANISATION INTERNATIONALE NON GOUVERNEMENTALE AYANT STATUT CONSULTATIF AUPRES DES NATIONS UNIES, DE L'UNESCO,
DU CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE ET D'OBSERVATEUR AUPRES DE LA COMMISSION AFRICAINE DES DROITS DE L'HOMME ET DES PEUPLES

International Federation
for Human Rights

Federación Internacional
de los Derechos Humanos

الفدرالية الدولية لحقوق الإنسان

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20500

4 October 2011

Dear President Obama,

On behalf of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), we are writing to alert you to the consequences of US policy on humanitarian aid, for women and girls in developing countries, including on victims of rape.

Current US policy imposes blanket abortion restrictions on humanitarian aid. There are **no exceptions for women who are victims of rape or whose lives are endangered**. These restrictions have the effect of preventing all those receiving US funding - governments, NGOs and other humanitarian aid providers - from providing the option of abortion to girls and women, including victims of rape. The restrictions often similarly affect countries benefiting from multi-national pooled funds to which the US contributes.

FIDH has 164 human rights member organizations throughout the world, including 37 in Sub-Saharan Africa, where the current restrictions under US policy on granting humanitarian aid have a particular impact on girls and women, including those in conflict situations where rape is often used as a weapon of war.

The denial of safe abortions for girls and women victims of rape during armed conflict is a violation of international humanitarian law. Rape in conflict is internationally recognized as a war crime and a crime against humanity as well as a form of torture, and in certain circumstances as a crime constituting genocide. Under the Geneva Conventions state parties to international or internal conflicts have the primary obligation to ensure comprehensive and non-discriminatory medical care.

On 5 November 2010, during the Universal Periodic Review of the US by the UN Human Rights Council, Norway requested the US to "remove its blanket abortion restrictions on humanitarian aid covering medical care given to women and girls raped and impregnated in situations of armed conflict." On 18 March 2011 the US responded that it could not do so, due to "currently applicable restrictions" – not statutory law.

We urge you to issue an executive order to lift the restrictions, at a minimum as they apply to victims of rape and those whose lives are endangered.

Despite UN Security Council Resolutions addressing violence against women in periods of conflict, the US, along with many other countries, has thus far been unable to contribute to preventing and punishing the use of rape as a weapon of war. But it can easily help to ensure that the victims of this hideous crime receive the medical care they are entitled to.

Yours sincerely,



Souhayr Belhassen
FIDH President