



Dear President Obama,

Santa Barbara Women Lawyers is a non-profit organization that promotes the diverse interests of women lawyers in Santa Barbara. We advocates gender equality through examining the problems of and proposing solutions to the internal and external factors that inhibit women in their quest for social and professional equality.

On behalf of Santa Barbara Women Lawyers members, I write to ask you to issue an Executive Order lifting the restrictions on United States humanitarian aid for abortion-related services to girls and women who have been raped.

The source for these restrictions is the Helms Amendment, originally enacted in 1973, which prohibits the use of federal funds for abortion services "as a method of family planning" and currently applies to all aid provided through the Foreign Assistance Act.

As a result of these restrictions, girls and women who are raped in the context of armed conflict find their suffering compounded by their inability to access medical care and information.

Rape and forced pregnancy are frequently part of violent attacks intended to torture or even kill girls and women. Those who survive such rapes frequently suffer from life-long physical, psychological and social consequences. These consequences are amplified for those girls and women who become pregnant from the rapes. Girls and women who survive these attacks often lack access, funds or information to abortion-related services; thus denying them the full range of health care services.

All victims of armed conflict are entitled to receive complete, appropriate and non-discriminatory medical care. The United States abortion restrictions on humanitarian aid undermine the rights of survivors of rape in armed conflict to non-discriminatory medical care and should therefore be lifted.

Santa Barbara Women Lawyers thank you for your leadership in the fight for gender equality. We urge you to issue an Executive Order lifting the restrictions on abortion services for victims of rape in armed conflict situations, thereby ensuring that United States humanitarian aid relieves, and does not perpetuate, the suffering of these women and girls.

Sincerely,

Gabriela Ferreira
President
Santa Barbara Women Lawyers