

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

Cairo, June 1st 2012

Dear President Obama,

We are writing to you to express our concern regarding the rights of girls and women raped in armed conflict.

The Egyptian Center for Women's Rights (EWCR) is an organization dedicated to supporting women in their struggle to learn their full rights and establish gender equality.

Thousands of girls and women raped and impregnated in armed conflict face additional suffering by being routinely denied abortions in humanitarian medical settings. The United States, being the largest donor of humanitarian aid globally, has enormous influence on how aid is provided and currently restricts all humanitarian aid to be used for the provision of abortions.

However, girls and women raped in armed conflict are entitled to abortions under common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions, Articles 10 and 16 of Additional Protocol I, Articles 7 and 10 of Additional Protocol II, and customary international law (CIL). The "blanket abortion restrictions," as Norway called the US restrictions during the Universal Periodic review of the United States by the UN Human Rights Council in November 2010, violate the rights of girls and women.

The Geneva Conventions mandate "comprehensive" and "non-discriminatory" medical care to the wounded and sick during armed conflict. Victims of war rape are torture victims and the Human Rights Committee, as well as the Committee against Torture, have found that blanket denial of abortion to victims of rape can constitute torture, or cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment.

While a lot remains to be done when it comes to bringing equal rights to Egyptian women, the grand imam of Egypt's Islamic body, Al-Azhar, issued a fatwa under Islamic law sanctioning abortion at any time during pregnancy for women who have been raped.

Dr. Ameena Nasseer, Professor of theology and philosophy at Cairo's Al-Azhar University, followed this stance stating, "*Rape is similar to death for a woman and causes extreme psychological damage ... abortion helps her to get rid of this painful memory.*"

During the Bosnian war, when Muslim women were raped and impregnated by the Serbian army, an imam issued a fatwa condoning abortions in cases of rape. War rape

- typically gang rape - has been also been classified by international courts as a war crime, an act of genocide, a crime against humanity, and a form of torture.

We join the call of experts and international organizations and ask you to lift all abortion restrictions on humanitarian aid via an Executive Order. Every day these restrictions affect girls and women who need access and information on life saving and medically indicated abortions.

Egypt was the first Arab country to ratify CEDAW, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, whose committee recommends legislation that permits safe abortions to the victims of incest and rape.

Our organization sincerely hopes that, with being the first organization from the Middle East to write to you on this pressing issue, many more will follow. The lifting of the restrictions is crucial for the countries where rape is used as a weapon of war.

Dear Mr. President, the United States is known for its long history of fighting for the rights of girls and women. The United States cannot demand from countries in the Middle East to end discrimination against women while at the same time violate its own obligations to provide non-discriminatory medical care to women under the Geneva Conventions.

Thank you for your attention on this matter.

Respectfully,
N. Aboulkomsan