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EU Finalizes Divorce From US Abortion Ban

New York – Today, the EU adopted its [2016 budget](#) containing the first ever anti-Helms Amendment. The US Helms amendment currently imposes an abortion ban on all US foreign aid, including support for girls and women raped in armed conflict.

The 2016 EU Budget requires that all humanitarian entities funded by the EU provide assistance “in accordance with international humanitarian law”, without “discrimination or adverse distinction.” And, in a reference to the US Helms amendment, the budget mandates EU funds “not be subject to restrictions imposed by other partner donors.”

In September 2015, following the lead of the UK, the EU for the first time acknowledged that female war rape victims must be provided abortions as part of their right to nondiscriminatory medical care under the Geneva Conventions, irrespective of the restrictive abortion laws that exist in most conflict countries.

[Sophie in 't Veld](#) (Member of European Parliament The Netherlands, ALDE/ D66), who proposed this Budget language, stated that:

“The EU is taking steps to ensure that EU humanitarian aid funds are not tainted by other donor countries, like the abortion ban on US funds...to force a girl enslaved by ISIS, kidnapped by Boko Haram or raped in the DRC to bear a child of her rapist and as a result is expelled from the community and condemned to poverty, is inhumane treatment. Sexual violence is a devastating weapon in the war-torn areas, these women and girls are war wounded and should be treated equally.”

Janet Benshoof, President of the Global Justice Center, which is leading the campaign to ensure female war rape victims are provided abortions as a matter of their right to nondiscriminatory medical care under the Geneva Conventions, stated: **“Only the EU is powerful enough to stop the Helms amendment being the instrument of death and suffering for female war rape victims that it is today.”**

According to Benshoof, the EU policies require changes in the practices of nearly all the major humanitarian entities currently providing medical care for war victims including the ICRC, UNFPA, UNICEF, Save the Children, the International Rescue Committee, among others.

The EU Parliament was even more explicit in its 15 December 2015 Report for the upcoming UN World Humanitarian Summit. The EU parliament: **“Urges that the provision of humanitarian aid follows international humanitarian law, and that EU humanitarian aid not be subject to restrictions imposed by other partner donors; ...and that women and girls have access to the full range of sexual and reproductive health services, including safe abortions, in humanitarian crises, rather than perpetuating what amounts to inhumane treatment, as required by international humanitarian law and as foreseen in the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols.”**

With the endemic use of rape as a weapon of war in conflicts across the globe, this dramatic policy shift demonstrates a sea change toward ensuring that all girls and women raped in war are provided comprehensive medical care.

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