

PRESIDENT OBAMA URGED TO END U.S. VIOLATION OF THE RIGHTS OF RAPE SURVIVORS IN ARMED CONFLICT

To coincide with the anniversary of the U.S. signing the Geneva Conventions, the Global Justice Center launched the global “August 12th” campaign to urge President Obama to immediately lift the “no abortion” restriction attached to all U.S. humanitarian aid for medical care given to girls and women raped and impregnated in armed conflict.

[NEW YORK, NY] – Aug. 25, 2011 - Thousands of girls and women raped and impregnated in armed conflict face additional suffering by being routinely denied abortions in humanitarian medical settings. The Geneva Conventions mandate “comprehensive” and “non-discriminatory” medical care to the wounded and sick during armed conflict and United Nations treaty bodies and courts characterize deliberate denial of abortion to impregnated rape victims as cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. Yet, the United States (the “U.S.”) attaches a “no abortion” prohibition to all U.S. humanitarian aid, including for war rape victims whose rights are guaranteed under the laws of war. Therefore, the Global Justice Center (the “GJC”) coordinated a consortium of over 3,000 leading legal, human rights, public health and humanitarian organizations and experts from the U.S., Canada, Europe, Africa, and Latin & South America to urge President Obama to immediately lift the “no abortion” restriction attached to all U.S. humanitarian aid. To view the GJC’s letter to the President go to: <http://bit.ly/GJClletter>.

GJC President, Janet Benshoof, applauding the outpouring of support for the rights of rape survivors, stated:

“This U.S. policy is horrifying and illegal and has resulted, however unintentionally, in such inhumane actions as forcing continued pregnancy on thirteen year old girls raped by the military. We strongly believe that President Obama is firmly committed to ensuring that the U.S. fully complies with the Geneva Conventions. To do so, President Obama must issue an executive order lifting the abortion prohibition and take other measures to ensure that all female survivors of rape in armed conflict get the care they need and are entitled to by international law.”

- As the largest donor of humanitarian aid, the U.S. “no abortion” policy greatly influences how humanitarian organizations and on-the-ground medical teams treat pregnant rape victims in conflict areas.
- Because donor funds are commingled, the U.S. policy prevents other donor countries that seek to provide full medical care (including abortions) for girls and women raped in conflict from doing so.
- Norway confronted the U.S. on its “no abortion” policy for rape victims at the UN Human Rights Council in November 2010. Norway asked the U.S. to “remov[e] blanket abortion restrictions on humanitarian aid covering medical care given to women and girls raped and impregnated in situations of armed conflict.” On March 18, 2011, the U.S. stated in response to Norway that it could not remove the prohibition due to “currently applicable restrictions.”

President Obama can issue an executive order lifting these abortion restrictions. Current U.S. policy, formalized by a USAID regulation promulgated by the Bush Administration in June 2008, requires that a “base clause” prohibiting both abortion speech and payment for abortion services be inserted in all foreign aid appropriations for any purpose. This “no abortion” clause, inserted in grants and contracts with foreign governments, humanitarian organizations, the United Nations and nonprofit groups, is far more restrictive

than statutory requirements, including the Helms Amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act of 1973, which would permit U.S. funding to be used for abortions in cases of rape, incest, and to save the life of a woman (although USAID has never done so). The Obama Administration vigorously enforces this prohibition; just recently the U.S. threatened to pull its foreign aid to Malawi unless the country's Health Minister, whose salary is paid for with U.S. foreign aid, stopped speaking about a medical study on unsafe abortion.

An increasing number of prominent legal, humanitarian, public health, women's and human rights groups are joining this Campaign. Signatory organizations that work with victims of war rape confirm that forcing continued pregnancies resulting from these rapes has severe physical and psychological consequences for victims. Therefore, U.S. policy "inevitably imposes the legacy of war upon their families, communities, and entire nations for generations to come."

To date, letters sent to President Obama by organizations include:

- Amnesty International USA, representing nearly 300,000 members;
- The New York City Bar Association, representing over 23,000 members;
- The European Women's Lobby, an umbrella organization for 2,500 organizations in 30 European countries;
- Solidarity for African Women's Rights, a pan-African coalition of 39 organizations and regional networks;
- Women's Link Worldwide, an INGO based in Colombia, joined with 29 organizations and prominent individuals in Latin America and Uganda.

For a compilation of letters sent as of August 25, 2011, go to: <http://bit.ly/LettersAugust12th>.

Organizations and experts wishing to join the Campaign can find more details on the Global Justice Center August 12th webpage: <http://bit.ly/12august>. Individuals wishing to support the Campaign can sign a petition to President Obama at Change.org: <http://chn.ge/q95BXy>.

About The Global Justice Center

The Global Justice Center (www.globaljusticecenter.net) is a New York based international human rights NGO that works to promote justice and gender equality by creating legal precedents and legal tools to advocate for the progressive interpretation and aggressive enforcement of international law.

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