



**SYNERGIE DES FEMMES  
POUR LE VICTIMES DES  
VIOLENCES SEXUELLES**

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington D.C. 20500

Dear President Obama,

I am writing to you on behalf of Synergie des Femmes pour les Victimes des Violences Sexuelles (Women's Synergie for Victims of Sexual Violence), a Democratic Republic of Congo-based organization that unites the skills of 35 Congolese organizations to address the issue of sexual violence in Eastern Congo. As an "on the ground" organization providing medical care, psycho-social assistance, and legal defense to victims of sexual violence, we urge you to issue an Executive Order rescinding the "no abortion" policy attached to US humanitarian aid, specifically in the context of victims of rape in conflict.

Nowhere in the world is the use of rape as a weapon in conflict more rampant than in Eastern Congo. At SFVS we see first-hand the life-long physical, psychological, and social consequences that girls and women raped and impregnated in conflict endure. Tragically, thousands of girls and women raped and impregnated in conflict around the world face additional suffering when they are denied abortions in humanitarian medical settings. The United States, the biggest humanitarian aid provider in the world, currently imposes blanket abortion restrictions on its humanitarian aid with no exceptions for girls and women who are victims of war rape and whose lives are endangered by forced pregnancy.

In my experience working with victims of rape and sexual violence, I have seen first-hand time and again the devastating impregnation resulting from these crimes. Women give birth to children who are ostracized. First, their mothers reject them because they remind them of the fathers who brutally treated them. Then, the community at large alienates them. If women had the right to terminate their pregnancies, there would be much less suffering both on the part of the mothers and on the part of the children.

These restrictions impede governments, humanitarian aid agencies, and NGOs from providing the option of abortion with American funds. Additionally, when multi-nationally funded organizations pool their money together, these restrictions prevent the funds of other countries from being used to provide life-saving abortions.

The denial of safe abortions for girls and women victims of rape during armed conflict is a violation of international humanitarian law. The right of the “wounded and sick” to comprehensive medical care is guaranteed by Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions, Articles 10 and 16 of Additional Protocol I, Articles 7 and 10 of Additional Protocol II, Article 14 of the Convention Against Torture, and customary international law. Nevertheless, despite these clear mandates, girls and women raped and impregnated in conflict are denied abortions, largely due to the global effect of the US prohibitions. These girls and women, including many of whom come for help at SFVS, are the only category of war victims who are systematically denied their right to complete medical care.

The United States’ “no abortion” prohibition represents an impediment to equal justice for girls and women raped in conflict. SFVS urges you to stop inflicting additional harm to these vulnerable victims of armed conflict and issue an executive order removing these “no abortion” restrictions.

Sincerely,



Justine Masika Bihamba

Co-founder

Synergie des Femmes pour les Victimes des Violences Sexuelles

cc : Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, US Department of State