



Abortion rights advocates call on the United Nations to make International Safe Abortion Day, 28 September, an official UN day

17 August 2016

UN agencies supporting women's rights have been asked today to send "a strong signal" to governments around the world by passing a resolution at this year's UN General Assembly in September to make International Safe Abortion Day an official UN day. An Open Letter was sent to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the heads of UN Women, UN Development Programme, World Health Organization, UN Population Fund, UN Children's Fund, UNAIDS, and UNESCO on 17 August.

"It is totally unacceptable that we continue to allow women and girls to die from unsafe abortions," said Dr Eunice Brookman-Amisshah, former Health Minister of Ghana and Special Advisor to the Ipas President for African Affairs, *"We know from evidence that access to safe abortion saves lives – and we know exactly how to provide these services too."*

September 28 has been an international day of action in support of safe abortion since 1990, when the women's health movement in Latin America first launched a campaign on that date. Today, abortion rights advocates in every region of the world organise activities each year.

"The date was defined as a day of struggle for abortion rights in a region where some of the most draconian laws criminalizing abortion were and still are on the books," said Sonia Corrêa, Co-Coordinator of the Sexuality and Policy Observatory, Sexuality Policy Watch, Brazil. *"The choice of date was inspired by the abolition of slavery for children born to slave mothers in Brazil in 1871, when it was named the Day of the Free Womb."*

The Open Letter was written by the International Campaign for Women's Right to Safe Abortion, a network of almost 1,800 groups and individuals from 115 countries. It was signed by 430 international, regional and national organizations, groups and individuals from 73 countries around the world, representing thousands of people.

The letter calls on the UN Secretary-General and UN agencies to acknowledge that making abortion safe is in line with a growing number of inter-governmental agreements, starting with the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action in 1994, the Beijing Women's Conference Platform for Action in 1995, the Latin American Convención de

Belém do Pará in 1996, the African Maputo Protocol of 2005, and most recently the call for the decriminalisation of abortion across Africa by the African Commission for Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR).

These agreements and commitments all recognise that unsafe abortion is a serious public health problem and a violation of women's human rights that needs to be alleviated.

Liz Maguire, Global Reproductive Health and Rights Advisor, former President and CEO of Ipas and former Director of USAID's Office of Population and Reproductive Health, said:

"We cannot fulfil our duty to respect, protect, and fulfil women's sexual and reproductive rights until we end the needless deaths and suffering from unsafe abortion and ensure that abortion is safe, legal, accessible and affordable for all women and girls everywhere."

The Open Letter points out that women are still suffering and dying from complications of unsafe abortion in many global South countries. Deaths from unsafe abortion worldwide were estimated at 43,684 in 2013, accounting for 14.9% of all maternal deaths. Since the International Conference on Population and Development in 1994, in fact, almost 1 million women have died from unsafe abortions, almost all of which were avoidable.

Moreover, post-abortion care for complications of unsafe abortion was provided to 6.9 million women in developing regions in 2012, costing health systems an estimated US\$ 232 million. Thus, in a situation of continuing illegality of abortion, post-abortion care has proven not to be the answer that the ICPD hoped it would be.

In presenting the Open Letter to UN Secretary Ban Ki-moon, Ms Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi from South Africa, Special Envoy on Gender of the African Development Bank, said:

"We are asking the United Nations to recognize this day and make it official in the UN calendar with a resolution at the UN General Assembly. We also want to encourage the UN agencies, especially UN Women, UNDP, WHO and UNFPA, to make 28 September an official day in their own right, given its relevance to the work they do on behalf of women and girls in so many different ways."

Marge Berer, who coordinated this initiative on behalf of the International Campaign for Women's Right to Safe Abortion, said:

"Safe abortion is an essential health service for women. Would anyone today deliberately withhold effective HIV treatment or safe contraception from people who need them? Why, then, is it still acceptable that safe abortion is being withheld from so many women and girls with unwanted pregnancies?"

Read the Open Letter [here](#)

<http://www.safeabortionwomensright.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Open-Letter-to-United-Nations-leaders-re-making-International-Safe-Abortion-Day-28-September-an-official-UN-Day-17-August-2016.pdf>

The letter was signed by and delivered to:

- **Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon**, by Ms Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi, Special Envoy on Gender of the African Development Bank, South Africa
- **Dr Babatunde Osotimehin, Executive Director, UN Population Fund** by Dr Eunice Brookman-Amissah, Special Advisor to the Ipas President for African Affairs, Ghana, *and* Liz Maguire, Global Reproductive Health and Rights Advisor, USA
- **Ms Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director, UN Women** by Ms Gro Lindstad, Executive Director, Fokus – Forum for Women & Development, Norway
- **Ms Helen Clark, Administrator, UN Development Programme** by Ms Petra Bayr, Member of Parliament, Spokesperson for Global Development, Social Democratic Party, Austria
- **Dr Margaret Chan, Director General, World Health Organization** by Dorothy Shaw, Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, University of British Columbia, Canada
- **Mr Anthony Lake, Executive Director, UN Children's Fund** by Ms Katja Iversen, President/CEO, Women Deliver, USA
- **Michel Sidibé, Executive Director, UNAIDS** by Ms Sonia Corrêa, Associate Researcher, Associação Brasileira Interdisciplinar de AIDS, and Co-Coordinator of the Sexuality and Policy Observatory, Sexuality Policy Watch, Brazil, *and* Ms Alexandra Johns, Executive Director, Asia Pacific Alliance for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, Thailand
- **Ms Irina Bokova, Director General, UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization** by Marge Berer, International Coordinator, International Campaign for Women's Right to Safe Abortion, Peru/UK

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