



**INTERNATIONAL  
CAMPAIGN  
FOR WOMEN'S  
RIGHT TO SAFE  
ABORTION**

## **Forming a coalition to fight for free, legal and safe abortion in Ecuador**

**National Coalition-Building Meeting, Quito  
18 May 2019**

### **I. Key aspects of the legal, health service and advocacy landscape on abortion (safe and unsafe)**

In Ecuador there are socio-cultural patterns, hegemonic social discourses and beliefs, laws and norms that restrict women's rights, including the right to access safe and free abortion. Abortion has been constructed in the imagination of the population as a sin, an amoral and selfish act that must be socially punished, even though the majority of the population considers that it should not be criminally punished.

The Ecuadorian Criminal Code establishes only two causes where abortion is not punishable: 1. When it has been practiced by health professionals to protect the life and health of women when the danger cannot be avoided by other means; and 2. When pregnancy is the product of the rape of a woman with a mental disability (Art. 150). The same Code establishes that the woman who causes an abortion must be punished with a penalty of 6 months to 2 years in prison (Art. 149).

According to the most recent figures from the Ministry of Health (ENDEMAIN 2004), only 63% of live births were wanted. 17% were deliveries of women who wanted to wait longer before becoming pregnant. The remaining 20% were unwanted births. This shows that in Ecuador there is a large gap or imbalance in achieving fertility goals, which mainly affects the poorest women, peoples and nationalities, and those with less access to education.

One of the barriers faced by women in Ecuador to access sexual and reproductive health services, and specifically to legal abortions and care for post-abortion complications is the illegality that leads to criminalization. Since 2009 there have been prosecutions of women for abortion in Ecuador. Official data from the State Attorney General's Office mentions that from August 2013 to January 2019, 435 women have been prosecuted for illegal abortions. Most of the women were reported to the police by health professionals who provided post-abortion care for complications for illegal abortions. The criminalization of abortion differentially affects the most impoverished women. Hence, we argue that to criminalize abortion is to criminalize poverty.

### **II. Organization and work on abortion**

Surkuna is a feminist organization that works for access to justice for women prosecuted for abortion and childbirth in Ecuador. In the last 5 years we have provided legal advice and legal support to the lawyers representing women prosecuted for abortion so that they receive adequate legal defence. At the same time, we have directly litigated some cases for women prosecuted for abortion and childbirth in Ecuador. In addition, we have promoted the formation of a Network of Litigating Lawyers at the national level, in which we are working to strengthen the capacities of lawyers to litigate, the training of health professionals and the training of public defenders.

We also work for a change in the laws and regulations that restrict women's access to abortions, providing legal analysis and specialized technical advice to decision-makers on

the subject.

Lastly, we work for the formation of a feminist movement for the defence of free, legal and safe abortion through the strengthening of the capacities of feminist organizations, defenders of the right to abortion and the organization of political confluence and space that will allow us to expand our actions. It was under this form of action that we organized a national coalition building meeting.

### **III. Aim, outcomes and lessons learned from the meeting**

The meeting was held on 18 May 2019 within the framework of the International Day of Action for Women's Health (see Annex 1 for the agenda). It was a one-day meeting with the participation of 18 organizations nationwide and more than 50 women.

We identified that in the current political moment, there are contextual differences in different parts of the country. We therefore decided that the participation of organizations and advocates for the right to abortion in the city of Quito would be prioritized, as well as the participation of organizations that are already working on abortion as their primary issue.

The overall objective of the meeting was to develop a two-year national action plan for the campaign for free, legal and safe abortion – to seek to achieve progress in women's access to safe abortions and shift public opinion towards support for the decriminalization of abortion. Specific objectives were to:

- Define the political principles that allow us to work together and articulate them in the campaign.
- Publicly present the campaign in the media, as a key actor in the protection of the right to abortion.
- Strengthen ties between organizations at the national level that work for the right to free, legal and safe abortion.

The formation of a national campaign for the right to free, legal and safe abortion is a challenge, as it has to represent and include a range of strategic actors, including civil society organizations that have been working on abortion for years, advocates for the right to free, legal and safe abortion as well as other allies who are in academia, decision-making institutions, and health professionals.



In that sense, it has been difficult to reach specific agreements that can allow for the

campaign to position itself as a fundamental actor in the public debate around abortion. This is due to the fact that in Ecuador, we are currently in the midst of a debate about supporting the decriminalization of abortion for rape. That debate has generated divisions between those in the movement who are working for legal abortion following rape and those who would like to work on a broader campaign proposal.

We expected the meeting to be a space to formulate a work plan for the campaign for free, legal and safe abortion. Nevertheless, the expectations of the participants were different, and the meeting decided to have two sessions given the context in the country. In the first session the organizations present broadly explained what their work on abortion is, and then we constructed a timeline and context analysis. In the second session we had a discussion among organizations that were interested in constituting a campaign for free, legal and safe abortion.

The meeting recognized that the strategy of forming a campaign for free, legal and safe abortion in Ecuador is a long-term strategy which requires us all to recognize the diversity within the movement. It was therefore proposed that the campaign should hold periodic meetings, which will allow us to share strategies for the long-, medium- and short-term.

The main achievements of the first part of the meeting were:

- 1) Recognize ourselves as a movement in favour of free, legal and safe abortion and the diversity of female actors that are part of it.
- 2) Build a timeline that shows all the work that has been done over time, which allows us to identify the key milestones in the fight for free, legal and safe abortion in the country.
- 3) Conduct a contextual analysis of the comprehensive criminal code and how abortion has been seen as a part of it over the years.

The main achievements of the second part of the meeting were:

- 1) Develop the broad political objectives of the campaign
- 2) Form working groups
- 3) Define a permanent meeting strategy to organize.



#### **IV. Future priorities and follow-up activities**

It is important to highlight that it will be necessary to organise new meetings to strengthen the formation of a campaign, including its structure. This also allows organizations to provide

updates on their current work on abortion and discuss how the campaign can support this work. In that sense, the priorities and monitoring strategies for the future are:

- 1) Identification of the organizations that are working at national level on the issue of abortion and mapping of the different strategies that are being implemented.
- 2) Promote the realization of meetings and local meetings with organizations and individuals who are willing to sustain the campaign in the localities.
- 3) Promote a permanent meeting space for the formation of the campaign in the city of Quito, which will allow us to define a solid and clear structure and develop the strategic and operational plan in the long, medium and short term.

There will be three organizations responsible for promoting this space, which are the "Vivas Nos Queremos" Platform, Surkuna and Las Comadres.

One of the biggest challenges for the construction of a national coalition is how organizations and individuals will come together in this space. That is why the meeting was re-shaped so that it could allow us to make an analysis of the historical and political context, in addition to generating a timeline that shows all the work that has been done over time and also facilitate an inter-generational dialogue. Therefore, we considered the structure, principles and objectives in a closed group with allied organizations only and then later included the individuals who wanted to join.



## Annexes

### Annex 1: Agenda

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##### SEGURIDAD:

Consignas seguridad (acuerdos grupales)

- Palabra – construcción colectiva
- No fotografía, audios
- No filmación
- Membretes nombres (masking)
- Hoja de registro

Hora	Actividad	Descripción	Materiales
9h30 - 10h00	Registro	Mesa de Inscripción	Hoja de registro membretes
10h00 10h15	- Presentación	Palabras de las organizaciones convocantes (Surkuna, Vivas y Las Comadres) a que salude, cuente los objetivos de la reunión el propósito de la jornada y la agenda del día.	Papelotes Marcadores
10h15 11h15	- Línea de tiempo sobre aborto en Ecuador (quiénes somos)	Socializar la línea de tiempo construida en las jornadas de aborto (realizadas en mayo del año pasado) Esto nos dará piso y mostrará que hay organizaciones que lideran el proceso desde hace años. Aterrizar en quiénes somos.  Algunos puntos para recordar: Previo trabajo movimiento mujeres (Ana) 1998- Coordinadora Juvenil- Derechos Sexuales y Derechos Reproductivos Constituyente y Formación de Coalición x la Despenalización Aborto (200 organizaciones juveniles)  2006- PAE Y Ley Orgánica 2007- Frente Derechos sexuales y derechos reproductivos 2008- salud mujeres Líneas regionales Proceso organización juvenil  2010- Acuerdo Nacional Juvenil  2012- Gran Marcha- Código Orgánico 2012- movimiento- aborto en dos causales (6 puntos)- alianza grupo LGBTI  2013 COIP- ( 28 septiembre marcha, 11 de octubre)- cuartito CPJ  2014- criminalización- y retroceso leyes y políticos de derechos (ENIPLA, PLAN FAMILIA) , un año formando Comadres, Surkuna, Yo Soy 65- Encuesta  2015 lanzamiento Comadres, red Nacional coyuntura- grupos antiderechos- marchas- tomar las calles estrategias- conectar nacional e internacional. Presentación Ruth- Stefy	Proyector Audio Presentación
11h15- 11h30	REFRIGERIO		

11h30 - 12h00	Contexto regional. Mapa de la región.	Contar el contexto de iniciativas de organizaciones que trabajan aborto, desde dónde, campañas de la región, etc.  Sobre el contexto- preguntas y comentarios.	Proyector Audio Presentación
12h00 13h00	- Análisis de contexto local	Historia del aborto en el COIP y discusión en plenaria sobre el contexto actual:  Campaña de aborto por violación, reformas al CONA, reformas COIP entre otros.	
13h00 14h00	- ALMUERZO		
14h00 15h30	- ¿Qué queremos hacer juntas?	Partiendo del contexto analizado, nos planteamos para qué queremos trabajar juntas, concretamente,  1. Presentarse - ¿Por qué viniste hoy?  2. ¿Qué acción prioritaria crees que podemos hacer juntas para lograr estas motivaciones? Trabajamos en 5 grupos (6 personas) cada grupo discute y escribe sus prioridades con base en un objetivo. Se termina con un juego para priorizar entre los cinco grupos. De este momento deben salir los acuerdos: cuándo se reúne la asamblea la próxima vez, cada cuánto se reunirá, que las moderaciones son rotativas. Debe quedar formada una comisión de logística y una de metodología.	Hojas A4 Papelotes Marcadores
15h30 16h30	- PLENARIA	Escucharnos para mirar en qué punto estamos como organizaciones y qué podemos hacer juntas	
16h30 17h00	- Cierre	Cuáles son los próximos pasos para seguir caminando.	Papelotes Marcadores Hojas A4 Cartulinas de colores