



Abortion law reform in Chile: National support for ending complete ban is strong

PRESS RELEASE: Embargoed: 3 March 2016 | available in English and Spanish

A number of Chilean NGOs, human rights and feminist organizations, academics and individuals have written a petition calling on President Michelle Bachelet and the Nueva Mayoría coalition to uphold their commitment of one year ago to ensure that the law on abortion is liberalised in the country.

It was in January 2015 that President Bachelet introduced a bill stating that Chilean women should have access to safe abortion services in the case of risk to the woman's life, when the pregnancy is not viable or when it is the result of rape. The country's Health Commission approved the bill just a few weeks later, but the Chilean Congress has still not legislated on the issue.

Chile is one of the few remaining countries in the world where abortion is illegal without exception. Yet, a representative [study](#) among women carried out by the human rights organization Humanas in 2014 showed 89.3% of women thought that if a woman does not want to be a mother it is as valid as if she does want to be a mother, and 60.2% thought it was the woman who should decide when and how many children to have. The study also found that most women (73-79%) agreed that abortion should be legalised on the following grounds:

- i. when pregnancy is the result of rape - 72.9%
- ii. when there is a risk to the woman's life - 79.2%
- iii. when the fetus has a serious malformation - 74.2%.

The petition, written and supported by a long list of Chilean human rights activists and experts¹ states:

“Those who are elected to represent us and ensure the implementation of the Government's programme have kept their distance or openly rejected this demand of the people and a commitment to women and women's human rights. This creates a gulf between our representatives and those whom they represent, discredits political parties, puts democracy at risk, and reinforces inequality.”

¹ Corporación Humanas, Amnesty International Chile, Observatorio de Género y Equidad, Fondo Alquimia, APROFA, Centro Estudios de la Mujer, Corporación MILES, Corporación Mujeres Líderes para Chile, Fundación Iguales, Instituto de la Mujer, Instituto Igualdad, Observatorio contra el Acoso Callejero, Revolución Democrática, and Colectivo Lemebel (a high school organization).

The solidarity request continues by saying that the Chilean Congress has “failed to acknowledge women’s equal status in society as citizens, with the autonomy and capacity to make decisions about their lives, their health and well-being”.

Chile has long been under pressure from international human rights bodies to improve their treatment of women when it comes to the right to abortion. Fernanda Doz Costa, researcher at Amnesty International, [stated](#) in 2015:

“Chile’s outrageous abortion ban creates a climate of fear among health professionals, whose first thought is often to report a woman or a girl to the police for a suspected [unsafe] abortion rather than give them life-saving treatment.”

Nearly 200,000 illegal abortions occur each year in Chile, and many of them are unsafe, according to the [Guttmacher Institute](#).

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