



August 24, 2011

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama,

On behalf of Amnesty International USA's nearly 300,000 members, I write to ask you to issue an Executive Order lifting the restrictions on U.S. humanitarian aid for abortion-related services to girls and women who have been raped or whose health is at risk. Given the broad reach and influence of US foreign aid, AIUSA is concerned about the impact of omitting abortion from medical services in humanitarian settings. As a result, girls and women who are raped in the context of armed conflict will find their suffering compounded by their inability to access needed medical care and information.

In armed conflicts throughout the world, rape and forced pregnancy are often part of violent attacks intended to torture, ostracize or even kill girls and women. Those who survive such rapes frequently suffer from life-long physical, psychological and social consequences. These consequences are amplified for those girls and women who become pregnant from the rapes. Girls and women who survive these attacks often lack access, funds or information to abortion-related services; thus denying them the full range of health care services.

Amnesty International believes that all victims of armed conflict are entitled to receive complete, appropriate and non-discriminatory medical care. Regrettably, U.S. policies which place restrictions on U.S. funds for abortion-related services contribute to the routine denial of access to the full range of medically appropriate care for victims of rape, which includes access to abortion. The source for these restrictions is the Helms Amendment, originally enacted in 1973, which prohibits the use of federal funds for abortion services "as a method of family planning" and currently applies to all aid provided through the Foreign Assistance Act.

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has interpreted the statute broadly in regulations and other guidance and statements and has in practice restricted funding for all abortion services. Restricting funding for abortion services where they are medically indicated, such as is the case for victims of rape in situations of armed conflict, goes beyond the statute, since such services cannot be considered a method of family planning. USAID has also inserted such restrictions reflecting its interpretation in virtually all contracts with foreign governments as well as

humanitarian and non-governmental organizations. USAID's current interpretation and implementation of the Helms Amendment goes beyond the statutory language, thus restricting the human rights of women who are raped in a situation of armed conflict to non-discriminatory medical care and undercutting U.S. humanitarian efforts.

The U.S. abortion restrictions on humanitarian aid undermine the rights of survivors of rape in armed conflict to non-discriminatory medical care and should therefore be lifted. We thank you for your dedication to combating human rights abuses internationally and for your leadership in the global fight for gender equality. We urge you to issue an Executive Order explicitly lifting the restrictions on abortion services for victims of rape in armed conflict situations, thereby ensuring that US humanitarian aid relieves, and does not perpetuate, human suffering.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Larry Cox". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Larry" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Cox".

Larry Cox  
Executive Director  
Amnesty International USA

Cc: The Honorable Hillary R. Clinton, Secretary of State, U.S. Department of State  
The Honorable Harold H. Koh, Legal Advisor, U.S. Department of State