

U.S. Blocks Abortion Access to Newly Freed Nigerian Captives Impregnated by Boko Haram

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[New York, NY] - The rescue of 234 women and girls from Boko Haram captivity on May 4, [214 of whom the United Nations Population Fund \(UNFPA\) reported to be pregnant](#), exposes the indignity of the U.S. foreign aid abortion ban, which severely limits the ability of sexual violence survivors to obtain the medical care they need.

“The international community must demand that these survivors of sexual violence receive fully comprehensive medical care, including access to safe abortions,” said Janet Benshoof, founder and president of the Global Justice Center, which is urging President Obama to issue an executive order to lift the abortion restrictions. “The Geneva Conventions guarantee these women and girls access to non-discriminatory medical care. Forcing these survivors to bear the children of their captors is simply inhumane.”

The U.S. abortion restrictions, outlined in the Helms Amendment, apply to all U.S. aid grantees, including the University of Maiduguri Teaching Hospital and the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) which are treating the rescued Nigerian women. Ms. Benshoof states that this U.S. policy ties the hands of both organizations to provide survivors of rape, captivity, and abuse the full scope of medical care.

“President Obama can and must take action to save these girls and others like them,” said Benshoof. “The U.S. must lead the world in rehabilitating survivors of sexual violence, not prolong their suffering.”

In contrast, the UK and the European Union have taken steps to ensure survivors of war rape are provided with access to safe abortions. In June 2014, the UK [informed](#) all of their aid partners that if denying an abortion to a female war rape survivor threatens her life, or would cause her unbearable suffering, such denial amounts to inhumane treatment and an act of torture under international humanitarian law principles. The European Parliament passed a [resolution](#) on April 30th in response to violence in Nigeria stating that “girls and women who are victims of rape in the context of armed conflict be offered the full range of sexual and reproductive health services, in EU-funded humanitarian facilities, in accordance with common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions, which guarantees all necessary medical care required by the condition of the wounded and sick, without making adverse distinctions.”

With its Universal Periodic Review (UPR) coming up next week, the Global Justice Center urges the Obama administration to stop perpetuating a policy which constitutes torture and violates the Geneva Convention. This is six years after President Obama issued the Executive Order ending torture as part of U.S. interrogations of terror suspects, citing U.S. compliance with the Geneva Conventions.

“The Geneva Conventions don’t just apply to terror suspects. They also apply to women and girls impregnated through war rape,” said Benshoof. “If the President fails to lift the ban, this U.S. policy will perpetuate the tactic of sexual violence by terrorists such as Boko Haram and ISIS.”

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