



FAITH LEADERS, ADVOCATES CALL ON OBAMA TO TAKE EXECUTIVE ACTION ON ABORTION FOR WOMEN RAPED IN CONFLICT

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Members of the Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and Unitarian Universalist communities, and human rights advocates gathered today in support of abortion rights and to call on President Obama to ensure access to safe abortion for women and girls raped in conflict.

During a news conference held at St. John's Episcopal Church, faith leaders released a [resolution](#) calling on Obama to take executive action – such as an executive order – on the Helms amendment, a decades-old provision that forbids the U.S. from paying for abortions overseas as a “method of family planning.” Helms, however, does not prohibit support in the cases of rape, incest, or life endangerment. Despite the distinction, lack of clarity and political barriers around Helms has seen it applied as a complete ban. No U.S. administration has ever implemented it correctly.

The news conference followed a morning-long summit co-hosted by the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC) and the Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE). The summit brought faith leaders and human rights advocates from across the country to discuss the rampant cases of gender-based violence in conflict and the lack of U.S. leadership in providing women and girls with comprehensive post-rape care.

Calling access to safe abortion a “vital component” of post-rape care, the resolution released at the news conference lamented that “President Obama has spoken compassionately toward women and girls raped in war and conflict, but has failed to act on that compassion,” and urged the president “to swiftly take executive action so that, until repeal, it is the policy of U.S. foreign assistance to support abortion access in the cases of rape, incest, and life endangerment.”

The resolution was signed by: Rev. Harry Knox, president and chief executive officer, The Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice; Taquiena Boston, director of multicultural growth, Unitarian Universalists Association; Rabbi Denise Eger, president, Central Conference of American Rabbis; Rev. Dr. C. Welton Gaddy, former president of Interfaith Alliance; Rev. Dr. Derrick Harkins, senior vice president for innovations in public programming, Union Theological Seminary; Sara Hutchinson Ratcliffe, domestic program director, Catholics for Choice; Kirsten Walling, justice and peace fellow, United Church of Christ; Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson, moderator, Metropolitan Community Churches; and Ani Zonneveld, founder and president, Muslims for Progressive Values.

“The call for compassion is common to many faith traditions. Religious people are led by our faiths to love our neighbors. Rape is a tool of war, and in the midst of that hell, women and girls who have survived atrocities deserve access to comprehensive post-rape care, including access to compassionate abortion. That’s what loving your neighbor looks like in this case,” said Knox, president and C.E.O. of RCRC.

“Access to safe abortion is a human right,” said CHANGE President Serra Sippel. “It would take just a swipe of the presidential pen to break barriers to abortion care for women and girls globally. Failure to stand with women and girls raped in conflict is unconscionable.”

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The summit was part of an international effort to secure executive action on Helms and was held in the midst of reports of campaigns of rape by ISIS in Iraq and Boko Haram in Nigeria. Many of these women and girls became pregnant and escaped their captors, only to be unable to access post-rape care including abortion services.

During today's event, Jaqueline Mutere, founder of Grace Agenda in Kenya, a Nairobi-based organization that helps survivors access post-rape care, shared her own story of surviving rape. Mutere was raped during the outbreak of violence following the 2007 elections in Kenya. Mutere became pregnant as a result of rape and tried three times to get a safe abortion but was unable to do so. Her experience inspired her to found Grace Agenda. President Obama is scheduled to travel to Kenya in July for the 2015 Global Entrepreneurship Summit (GES).

"As President Obama and the American people support conflict intervention programs globally, let him act now with compassion to enable women in post rape situations to access holistic post rape care which includes access to safe abortion," said Mutere. "Access to safe abortion is as critical as the peace process in conflict resolution."

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The Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE) is a U.S.-based non-governmental organization whose mission is to promote the sexual and reproductive health and human rights of women and girls globally by shaping the development and implementation of U.S. policies. We envision a world where sexual and reproductive health and rights are universally recognized, and where comprehensive, integrated sexual and reproductive health services are accessible and available to all, free from coercion, violence, and discrimination. For more information, visit www.genderhealth.org

The Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC) is the leading national multi-faith organization whose supporters are called by our faiths to build a just and righteous society by advancing reproductive health, rights and justice for all. We mobilize faith leaders in support of sexual and reproductive health and justice, focusing on contraception, abortion, and sexuality education. For more information, visit www.rcrc.org.