

US Abortion Restrictions of Foreign Aid Perpetuate Torture and Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment

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Today marks the 20th anniversary of U.S. ratification of the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT). Yet to this day, the U.S. repeatedly fails to meet its commitments under the treaty with its abortion restrictions on foreign assistance to girls and women raped in armed conflict.

In advance of the 53rd session of the Committee against Torture convening on November 3 in Geneva, the Global Justice Center (GJC) and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) [submitted a report](#) highlighting the inhuman treatment of impregnated war rape victims by the U.S. as a result of its “no abortion” policy placed on all U.S. foreign aid, including the Helms Amendment. The report details the horrific effects of the denial of safe abortion services on impregnated war rape victims, from increased risk of maternal mortality to extended and intensified physical and psychological suffering.

“OMCT is very concerned about the effect of the U.S. foreign aid policy on women’s rights to be free from torture and ill-treatment, said Carin Benninger-Budel, Human Rights Advisor on the Violence against Women’s Program at OMCT. “We, together with numerous other NGOs, already asked President Obama in 2012 to change the policy, the U.S. government, however, remained inactive.”

Over the past decade, international human rights bodies have repeatedly found that the denial of abortion, in particular to rape victims, can constitute torture or cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. The Committee against Torture has repeatedly called on states that have ratified CAT to reassess and change policies and laws that impede access to safe abortion services.

“By ratifying this treaty 20 years ago, the U.S. Government committed to ending the use of torture and inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment,” said Akila Radhakrishnan, GJC’s Legal Director, “However U.S. abortion restrictions on foreign assistance strongly contradict the object and purpose of CAT – this policy not only makes the struggle against torture less effective, but actively contributes to the suffering of rape victims and thus perpetuates ill-treatment.”

Due largely to GJC efforts, there is growing international recognition around the legal and moral imperative to provide all necessary medical care, including safe abortion services, to war rape survivors. GJC has successfully advocated for governments to segregate their foreign aid so as not to be compromised by the U.S. policy, as well as spearheaded a letter writing campaign representing over 3,500 groups to urge President Obama to issue an executive order lifting the abortion restrictions. Now, the Committee against Torture must urge the US Government to reverse this terrible policy so that the U.S. may live up to the standards it committed to twenty years ago when ratifying CAT.