

OPEN LETTER

IM-DEFENSORAS SUPPORTS “SOMOS MUCHAS” (“WE ARE MANY WOMEN”) NETWORK OF WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN HONDURAS

- We demand physical integrity and moral security guarantees for all women human rights defenders in the network
- We join in their demand for the decriminalization of abortion on three grounds

Mesoamerica, June 10, 2016 – The 750 women human rights defenders in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Nicaragua who make up the **Mesoamerican Initiative of Women Human Rights Defenders (IM-Defensoras)** express our total support for the demands to decriminalize abortion of “**Somos Muchas**” (“**We Are Many Women**”) network, which includes 20 organizations and collectives that promote and defend the human rights of women in Honduras.

“**Somos Muchas**” network has been created in the context of the National Congress for a new Penal Code, with the goal of opening up debate about the decriminalization of abortion on three grounds: when a pregnancy is the product of rape or incest; when the health and life of the pregnant woman is at risk; and when birth defects exist that are incompatible with life.

It is important to note that, in contravention of a number of recommendations of international entities in the field of human rights, abortion is totally criminalized in Honduras. In addition to being a serious health risk and an attempt against the right of women to decide about their own bodies, it also indicates that 15 thousand women enter hospitals in Honduras every year with a diagnosis of abortion, and they can be labeled criminales even though authorities have no knowledge of their histories, their motives or the factors that have led them to made this decisión.

In this situation, organizations and defenders promoting the human rights of women face a highly hostile response from religious hierarchies like the **Episcopal Congress of Honduras** and the **Brotherhood of Evangelical Churches of Honduras**, among others, who in addition to acting as lobbies that pressure State institutions to impose fundamentalist and misogynous dogmas, foment hate against women through their influence on the news media and broad sectors of the society.

The misogyny and scorn for the rights of women and sexual diversity are reflected, for example, in the fact that, according to UN data, a woman is killed in Honduras every 16 hours, which puts the country in first place on the planet in the commission of femicides. Misogyny and scorn are also

reflected in the high rate of hate crimes against the LGBTTTI population, with 220 people killed since 1994 and an impunity rate of 92%. As a result, it's no surprise, as reflected in our [2012-2014 Assessment Report on Attacks against Women Human Rights Defenders in Mesoamerica](#), that women who defend a life free of violence and those who defend the right to defend rights, are, with the exception of territorial defenders, the ones who suffer the most attacks in the country as a whole.

Far from trying to find a solution, the State seems to be more interested in meeting the demands of the fundamentalist hierarchies, as seen, for example, in their failure to ratify the **Optional Protocol on the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)**, despite Recommendation 126, adopted in the most recent **Universal Periodic Review (EPU)**.¹

IM-Defensoras is concerned that as a result of “**Somos Muchas**” having made their demands public, the fundamentalist hierarchies have reactivated their lobbying of institutions and their incitement of hate against women who defend their rights, transmitting to the society a distorted, falacious idea of human rights that goes against all international standards in the field and places women defenders, especially the spokeswomen and members of the network organizations, in a potentially risky situation.

Accordingly, **IM-Defensoras** makes the following demands on state authorities:

- That they guarantee the protection and the physical and moral integrity of all women human rights defenders in the “**Somos Muchas**” network.
- That they prevent, and if necessary, sanction any expression or action that indicates hatred against women, as well as any act of defamation, criminalization or disparagement against organizations or individual women defenders of the human rights of women.
- That they abide by the recommendations and conventions of international entities with regards to human rights instead of ceding to the pressure of religious groups.
- That they ratify the **Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)**.

¹ Previous to the discussion of the ratification of the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), State authorities only responded to one letter, which was signed by Pastor Alberto Solórzano, Presidente of the Evangelical Brotherhood of Honduras, dated May 4, 2015, in the EPU waiting room in Honduras. In it, he urged the State, through the Ministry of Human Rights, Justice, Internal Affairs and Decentralization, to refuse to ratify the CEDAW protocol because it would be “a judicial error for the society and our families.”

-That they contemplate the demands raised by the “**Somos Muchas**” network with regards to the decriminalization of abortion in the new Penal Code.

Likewise, we call on all international organizations and entities to express solidarity with the legitimate demands of the “**Somos Muchas**” network regarding the human rights of women, and to stay on the alert for further developments in this situation.



Nicaraguan Initiative of Women Human Rights Defenders