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Women

# 28 abortion rights successes in 2018

- IV Online magazine - 2018 - IV525 - October 2018 -

Publication date: Tuesday 16 October 2018

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### **For International Safe Abortion Day, on 28 September, we are celebrating 28 aspects of progress and success we've seen internationally this year.**

This year marks the 29th time our movement has celebrated 28 September as an international day for safe abortion. It has been a busy year for abortion rights campaigning, and a good one in many countries.

Much of the mainstream media reported on the Irish abortion referendum and the almost successful Argentinian law reform, but action has been taking place all over the world, inside and outside government, on the streets and in the media, from South Korea to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). [1]

Focusing on the increasingly organised and sometimes violent backlash against women's rights globally, and the myriad challenges we face, we sometimes lose sight of the many positive strides forward. This list celebrates these, and all the people who have worked tirelessly to make them possible. [2]

#### **1. El Salvador commutes two women's prison sentences**

In February, Teodora del Carmen Vásquez regained her freedom after serving 11 years in prison for aggravated homicide under El Salvador's extreme anti-abortion laws. [3] One month later, Maira Verónica Figueroa Marroquán was released after her own 30-year homicide sentence was commuted. "I am happy to be with my family," she said. "I want to study law to understand what happened to me and help other women." [4]

#### **2. New Zealand's prime minister announces intended legal reform**

Also in February, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern announced her decision to launch a reform of New Zealand's abortion law. [5] The country's current law permits abortion when a woman faces danger to her life, physical or mental health, or in cases of fetal anomaly.

#### **3. Macedonia also announces its intention to reform legislation**

On International Women's Day, 8 March, recently appointed Health Minister of Macedonia, Venko Filipce, announced that he would start working to amend the abortion law to protect women's health. [6] The current 2013 law is extremely restrictive and sparked widespread criticism from women's and human rights activists when it was adopted. [7]

#### **4. The DRC publishes the Maputo Protocol in its legal gazette**

Article 14 of the protocol requires that signatory states protect women's reproductive rights, including legal access to abortion. [8] The DRC's constitution states that ratified international treaties shall supersede national laws once published in the legal gazette. A coalition of national and local NGOs is now working to raise awareness of this change.

#### **5. Chilean feminists defend their new abortion law**

In March, feminists mobilised in Santiago to protect their new abortion law. [\[9\]](#) [\[10\]](#) Last year, the right to abortion on three grounds was won in Chile. [\[11\]](#) Although the new conservative government sought to restrict the law, it has so far been unsuccessful. In August, opposition MPs presented a bill to further legalise abortion, inspired by Argentina.

### 6. Cyprus reforms its abortion law

Also in March, after years of discussion and three years of inaction on a bill tabled in 2015, parliament reformed its law to allow abortion up to 12 weeks of pregnancy without having to prove risks to the woman's health and up to 19 weeks in case of rape. [\[12\]](#) The vote in support of the bill was 33 in favour, with eight against and five abstentions. [\[13\]](#)

### 7. Abortion clinic buffer zones established in Canada and London, UK

In April, Ealing Council in west London unanimously voted to implement a 100 metre buffer zone around a clinic to stop harassment of women and staff, though in September the Home Secretary refused to make the buffer zones national. [\[14\]](#) No-go zones for protestors were also established in Alberta, following several other Canadian provinces. [\[15\]](#)

### 8. French Equality Council proposes new constitutional rights

Also in April, the French High Council for Equality Between Women and Men published a call to modernise France's constitution to include rights to contraception and abortion, as a crucial way to guarantee gender equality. [\[16\]](#)

### 9. Women in government speak out in Zimbabwe for abortion law reform

In May, there were fresh calls for Zimbabwe's abortion law to be reformed, including from women in the health ministry and the Parliamentary Committee on Gender and Youth Affairs. MP Jessie Majome also argued that although abortion in cases of rape is legal, the red tape women have to go through makes it almost inaccessible. [\[17\]](#)

### 10. Mexican Supreme Court confirms right to abortion in two rape cases

On 15 and 18 May, the court ruled that two women had their rights violated when they were denied abortions after having been raped. Abortion is legal in cases of rape, but the women had to wait years for their appeals to be heard. [\[18\]](#) [\[19\]](#)

### 11. Ireland votes to repeal its constitution's eighth amendment

On 25 May, the country voted in a historic referendum to repeal the amendment which had given a fetus equal rights to those of a pregnant woman. Two-thirds of voters said 'yes' to the repeal motion, which passed in all but one of 40 local constituencies.

### 12. Action in Northern Ireland is also sparked by Ireland's referendum

There was an immediate call for Northern Ireland to be next, including from the regional director of the Royal College of Midwives, the Unite trade union, and more than 150 British MPs. [\[20\]](#) The Irish Prime Minister said he couldn't see

why women from Northern Ireland couldn't have abortions in the Republic, once procedures were legalised there.

### 13. A motion tabled in Jamaica calls for debate on abortion law reform

A group of experts on human rights in patient care urged legislators in April to repeal sections of the 1864 Offences Against the Person Act which prevent Jamaican women from legally terminating pregnancies. [\[21\]](#) On 5 June, a motion was tabled in parliament calling for debate on the law that criminalises abortion with life imprisonment. [\[22\]](#)

### 14. Ireland finally grants justice for Ms Y

A young woman, 'Ms Y,' sought refugee status in Ireland in 2014 after being kidnapped, beaten and raped by the head of a paramilitary organisation in her home country. She discovered she was pregnant, was denied an abortion even after threatening suicide, and was detained in hospital until told (falsely) that it was too late. [\[23\]](#) In June, Ireland's Health and Safety Executive acknowledged liability and offered her compensation.

### 15. Argentina's House votes to reform its abortion law, but Senate votes it down

In June, the House of Deputies voted to reform the abortion law by 131 to 123 votes. However, the Senate then voted against the reform in August, while hundreds of thousands of people, mostly women, demonstrated outside in the pouring rain. There were 66 solidarity events in 35 countries across four continents. [\[24\]](#)

### 16. A medical college in Ethiopia opens a new clinic

Also in June, a new clinic was opened at a hospital and medical college in Adama, Ethiopia. [\[25\]](#) On average, the clinic sees 100-120 girls and women every day. Teams of nurses and midwives provide contraception, counselling and abortion services. The clinic is a model of integrated sexual reproductive health services.

### 17. A public meeting in Madagascar discusses abortion law reform

On 1 July, a panel including the presidents of the National Association of Physicians and the Independent National Human Rights Commission discussed decriminalising abortion. Panellists highlighted the weight of the church in opposition and talked about unsafe abortion as a major public health concern. [\[26\]](#) [\[27\]](#)

### 18. Polish feminists stop debate on yet another anti-abortion bill

Also in July, Polish feminists managed to prevent the latest repressive abortion bill. [\[28\]](#) It aimed to criminalise abortion in cases of fetal impairment, which under the existing restrictive law make up 95% of legal abortions carried out in Polish hospitals. [\[29\]](#) Women had protested against the proposed bill throughout the year.

### 19. South Korean doctors demand legal reform

In August, the Health Ministry issued regulations which would have enabled authorities to suspend licenses of doctors providing abortions. In protest, nearly 2,500 members of the Korean College of Obstetrics & Gynaecology went on strike. The ministry rescinded the order, but the doctors have demanded a more fundamental solution.

### **20. The Isle of Man successfully reforms their abortion law**

On 6 July, the legislative council approved their abortion reform bill in full. [30] One council member, a bishop, proposed 71 amendments (which all failed). [31] Now abortion is permitted on request up to 14 weeks and in some circumstances up to 24 weeks.

### **21. Amnesty International adopts a new policy on abortion**

A July members' meeting in Poland called on states not just to decriminalise but also to guarantee access to safe and legal abortion. [32] In August, Amnesty took up the case of a 15-year-old girl locked up in Indonesia for having an abortion after being raped by her brother. She was released following international protests. [33]

### **22. Full text of draft bill to reform abortion law in CÔte d'Ivoire is published**

In July, a news source published the text of a draft bill which would broaden the legal grounds for abortion, which is currently prohibited except to save the life of the woman. [34] The draft bill would allow abortion, on the approval of at least three doctors, in cases of rape, incest, serious fetal malformations, and where the woman's health is at risk.

### **23. South Africa holds 'unfinished business' reproductive justice conference**

Rhodes University and partners hosted the Abortion & Reproductive Justice III: Unfinished Business conference in Makhanda, South Africa, in July. It attracted significant positive media attention and brought together researchers, activists, policy makers, and healthcare professionals from 30 countries.

### **24. Newly-elected Mexican government supports abortion law reform**

It was also announced in July that the new government-in-waiting of Andrés Manuel López Obrador will seek to decriminalise abortion throughout Mexico. [35] The future Interior Minister, Olga Sánchez Cordero, explained in a radio interview that she supports abortion up to 12 weeks because women "should not be deprived of their freedom". [36]

### **25. More than 100 groups march for abortion rights in the Dominican Republic**

On 15 July, thousands of people participated in the "March for Life, Health and Dignity of Dominican Women". [37] They called for the decriminalisation of abortion when the life of the woman is at risk, in cases of rape or incest, and when the fetus is not viable. Placards carried messages such as: "The rich abort, the poor die". [38]

### **26. US survey shows strong voter support for constitutional right to abortion**

More than 75% of respondents to an online survey (from across the political spectrum) said that any new Supreme Court justice should uphold women's right to abortion. The majority also said they believe that the right to abortion in the US is currently at risk.

### **27. Brazil's Supreme Court holds public hearing on criminalised abortion**

A public hearing was in August held on the constitutionality of a 1940 law criminalising abortion. [39] It was convened amid a case filed last year calling for decriminalisation of abortion on request in the first 12 weeks. [40] The case argues that criminalisation violates women's constitutional rights including those to life, dignity and equality. [41]

### 28. International abortion rights advocates gather in Lisbon, Portugal

More than 100 participants from 58 countries met in September and discussed topics from medical abortion to decriminalisation campaigns at a three-day forum to “develop an advocacy agenda for abortion in the 21st century and make change happen.”

#### [Open Democracy](#)

PS:

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