



**International Campaign for  
Women's Right to Safe Abortion**

## FEATURE: Children and parents protest in Paraguay in the case of the 10-year-old girl refused an abortion by the state

11 May 2015

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/protests-in-paraguay-where-abortion-is-illegal-in-case-of-10-year-old-rape-victim-1.3070439>



***A young girl holds a sign reading (in Spanish): "You'll forget it. Me, I will remember it for the rest of my life," at a demonstration in front of the Attorney General's office in Ciudad del Este, Paraguay.*** (Peter Prengaman/The Associated Press)

The fate of a pregnant 10-year-old has not only become a national debate in Paraguay but has underscored what activists say is a problem with child rape in this poor South American nation and led other victims to speak out.

Cristina Britez de Mendoza, director of a shelter for troubled youth in Ciudad del Este, said many of the children she works with have been sexually abused, such as a 12-year-old girl who gave birth last month. The girl lives at the shelter with the baby. "When the other children play, this girl wants to play, too," said Britez de Mendoza, who attended a rally to demand stiffer penalties for sex abusers. "She is still a child."

Monday's rally in Ciudad del Este drew 200 people under the banner of "No More Abuse!" and participants said it was unprecedented in this city with little culture of social protest. Another protest was held in the capital, Asunción.

The rallies came amid a fierce debate over what is best for a 10-year-old rape victim who is being denied an abortion. In Paraguay, the procedure is banned in all cases — even rape — except when the mother's [or in this case the child's] life is in danger...

Looking on at Monday's protest in Ciudad del Este, a 17-year-old told the Associated Press she had been repeatedly raped by her stepfather from the time she was nine until she was 14, when she told her mom about the abuse. "If I had seen protests like this before, maybe I would have spoken up sooner, or maybe it wouldn't have happened to me," said the girl, who is not being identified in line with Associated Press policy of not naming the victims of sexual abuse. She said her mother confronted her stepfather, who denied the abuse and still lives in the house. The girl said she is now physically strong enough to fend off his advances, but for a few years she was afraid of men and ate heavily — at one point she weighed 89 kilograms — to make herself less attractive. "I try not to be at home so I don't have to see him," she said through tears. "He makes me sick."

### **Official says pregnancy too advanced for abortion**

About 600 girls aged 14 or under become pregnant each year in this country of 6.8 million people. Studies by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control say thousands of children in the United States also give birth each year.

In Paraguay "these cases are very common. What's needed is the political will to get us out of this hole," said Britez de Mendoza, who runs the shelter in Ciudad del Este.

In the case of the 10-year-old, the girl's stepfather, who is accused of raping her, was arrested over the weekend and placed in isolation to prevent other inmates from attacking him. The girl's mother is being held at a female prison for neglecting to take care of her daughter.

In response to the calls for a therapeutic abortion for the girl, Paraguayan Health Minister Antonio Barrios has responded that the girl is in good health at a Red Cross hospital and that the pregnancy, at five months, is too advanced.

Some protesters said they think the case of the 10-year-old is the tip of the iceberg. "How many thousands of other girls are raped and we just don't hear about it because they don't have the baby or don't report it?" said Sebastian Martinez, 34.

© Associated Press

\*\*\*\*\*

### **UN experts deplore Government's failure to protect 10-year-old rape survivor**

11 May 2015

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=50826#.VVGJZ9pVhBc>

*The UN Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice is composed of five independent experts from all regions of the world: Emna Aouij of Tunisia, Rashida Manjoo of South Africa, Juan Mendez of Argentina; and Dainius Puras of Lithuania.*

In a statement released in Geneva yesterday, the four experts said Paraguay has refused to provide treatment to save the life of the girl, who is five months pregnant, "including safe and therapeutic abortion in a timely manner."

The girl's pregnancy – which came to light in national and international media several weeks ago – was the result of repeated sexual abuse allegedly perpetrated by her stepfather. Yet Paraguay's reportedly "restrictive" abortion laws only permit the termination of a pregnancy when the life of a woman or girl is at "serious risk."

"The Paraguayan authorities' decision results in grave violations of the rights to life, to health, and to physical and mental integrity of the girl as well as her right to education, jeopardising her economic and social opportunities," [warned](#) the four experts composing the UN Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice.

“Despite requests made by the girl’s mother and medical experts to terminate this pregnancy which puts the girl’s life at risk, the State failed to take measures to protect the health as well as the physical and mental integrity and even the life of the 10-year old girl,” they continued. “No proper interdisciplinary and independent expert assessment with the aim to insure the girl’s best interests was done before overturning life-saving treatments, including abortion.”

According to the World Health Organization ([WHO](#)), child pregnancies are extremely dangerous for the health of pregnant girls as they can lead to complications and death in some cases, especially as girls’ bodies are “not fully developed to carry a pregnancy,” the experts added.

In Latin America, in particular, the UN reports that the risk of maternal death is four times higher among adolescents under 16 years old with 65 per cent of cases of obstetric fistula occurring in the pregnancies of adolescents. In addition, early pregnancies are also dangerous for the babies with a mortality rate 50 per cent higher.

Against that backdrop, the UN experts welcomed last Friday’s decision by Paraguayan authorities to establish a multidisciplinary panel of experts to express itself on the terms of the overall health of the girl and to give an opinion on the risks and recommendations to ensure her health.”

Nevertheless, they noted that girl’s mother had reported the ongoing sexual abuse against her daughter in 2014 and deplored the authorities’ “unresponsiveness to take action.” Moreover, they said they “deeply regret” that the State had “failed in its responsibility to act with due diligence and protect the child.”

\*\*\*\*\*

A medical panel was created on Monday to assess her mental and physical health, said José Orué, the public defender for children in the city of Luque, where the girl lived with her mother and stepfather near the capital, Asunción. Experts say the girl isn’t ready mentally or physically to give birth. “When her baby arrives, the justice system will have to set a guardian and tutors for both of them,” Orué said.

Al Jazeera <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/5/12/un-raps-paraguay-over-pregnant-child.html>

\*\*\*\*\*