



United States Department of State

*Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs  
Washington, D.C. 20520-6258*

May 9, 2016

Nancy Northup  
President and CEO  
Center for Reproductive Rights  
199 Water Street, 22<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
New York, NY 10038

Dear Ms. Northup:

Thank you for your letter regarding the cases of “Manuela” and other women in El Salvador imprisoned for alleged aggravated or attempted homicide after experiencing obstetric complications. The Department shares your concerns about the issues of equitable access to justice and health care raised by these cases and we are following them closely. We appreciate the Center for Reproductive Rights’ work on this important issue.

We welcomed Salvadoran government actions to pardon or reduce the sentences of Carmen Guadalupe Vásquez Aldana and Cristina Quintanilla. We continue to have serious concerns, however, about criminal penalties for women seeking treatment for miscarriages and other obstetric emergencies as well as public health system limitations that disproportionately impact young women with limited financial resources and education. The U.S. Embassy in San Salvador has been in contact with the Salvadoran Human Rights Ombudsman about the status of these cases. The Department supports the removal of economic, cultural, social, and legal barriers to health care access and the full participation of women and girls in decisions about their health care. More broadly, strengthening democratic institutions – which can help protect women and other vulnerable groups by ensuring equitable access to quality government services – is one of the three pillars of the U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America.

We are working with the Salvadoran government to strengthen rule of law and protection of the human rights of women and girls through a variety of initiatives. Some of these initiatives have already proven successful in pilot projects, which the Salvadoran government is poised to implement or expand with U.S. government support, including: inauguration of 24 new centers to assist survivors of domestic and sexual violence; increased training in victims services and community outreach in model police precincts; an electronic case distribution system to increase efficiency and transparency in case assignments; and formation

of joint investigative teams that include prosecutors, police, and forensic experts in rural municipalities.

The Department is committed to promoting and protecting the human rights of all people, including women and girls, and will continue to engage the Government of El Salvador and civil society in constructive dialogue to encourage equitable access to healthcare and justice.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Mari Carmen Aponte", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Mari Carmen Aponte