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Ottawa, May 23, 2017

Manuel Orlando Cabrera Candray
Presidente de la Comisión de Salud de la Honorable Asamblea Legislativa
orlando.candray@asamblea.gob.sv

Dear Mr. Cabrera Candray

We the undersigned Canadian civil society organizations have been working directly or in solidarity with Salvadoran civil society organizations for many years. Through those relationships, we have learned of the deep concern of our counterparts regarding El Salvador's legislation on sexual and reproductive rights. Most notably, we share their concern regarding the law which criminalizes abortion under any circumstances, including when a pregnant woman's life or health is in danger and/or has been a victim of rape. El Salvador is one of only a handful of countries in the world with such harsh legislation.

The criminalization of abortion affects poor women disproportionately: while wealthier Salvadorans can pay for private services or seek medical care abroad, poor women often have no choice but to have illegal abortions in the country, exposing them to very high risks and contributing to high rates of maternal mortality and morbidity. The punitive legislation violates the right of Salvadoran women to health by deterring them from seeking post-abortion medical attention. This complete ban on abortion also has a further consequence on women, resulting in unfair imprisonment and establishing lengthy prison sentences, including for women who have suffered a miscarriage or other obstetric complications.

The Canadian organizations that are signatories to this letter are deeply concerned over the dramatic effect that punitive measures on women's reproductive rights can have on their lives and health. For this reason, our partners and allied organizations in El Salvador have been actively fighting to promote the decriminalization of abortion, given that the current situation is violating the most elementary human rights to life and health of Salvadoran women.

We are very pleased to learn that a modification to this legislation is currently being studied by the Salvadoran Legislative Assembly. We know that the proposed amendments would allow for abortions to take place under four specific circumstances: if there is a danger to the pregnant



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woman's health, in cases of rape, of fetal malformation, and cases of rape against adolescents and girls.

For the above-mentioned reasons, we strongly urge the Legislative Assembly and yourself as a Deputy to support proposed reforms to El Salvador's penal code, in order to ensure that they comply with the country's obligations under international human rights treaties¹ and are respectful of Salvadoran women's basic human rights to life and health.

Sincerely,

Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights
Amnesty International Canada
Atlantic Regional Solidarity Network (ARSN)
Canadian Federation of University Women
CoDevelopment Canada
Comité pour les droits humains en Amérique latine (CDHAL)
Comité Muralla 700 de Ottawa-Gatineau
Horizons of Friendship
Inter Pares
The MATCH International Women's Fund
Maritimes-Guatemala Breaking the Silence Network
OXFAM Canada

cc. Edgar Palacios, Ambassador of El Salvador in Canada

¹ El Salvador's total ban on abortion violates a number of human rights enshrined in various human rights instruments, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).