International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics
Why FIGO favors greater access to safe abortion services

FIGO Working Group on Prevention of Unsafe Abortion and its Consequences
FIGO position is based in Ethical considerations and in current evidences.
ETHICAL ISSUES IN OBSTETRICS AND GYNECOLOGY
by the FIGO Committee for the Study of Ethical Aspects of Human Reproduction and Women’s Health
OCTOBER 2009
Abortion for non-medical reasons

Providing the process of properly informed consent has been carried out, a woman’s right to autonomy, combined with the need to prevent unsafe abortion, justifies the provision of safe abortion.
Most people, including physicians, prefer to avoid termination of pregnancy and it is with regret that they may judge it to be the best course, given a woman’s circumstances.
In summary, the Committee recommended that after appropriate counselling, a woman has the right to have access to medical or surgical induced abortion, and that the health care service had an obligation to provide such services as safely as possible.
Why FIGO favors greater access to safe abortion services

• Unsafe Abortions cause suffering and deaths
Maternal Deaths

Unsafe Abortion is one of the main causes of maternal mortality in the countries where abortion is illegal.
Unsafe abortion-related maternal deaths per 100,000 live births and annual percent change from 1990 to 2008, major regions

Note: Japan, Australia and New Zealand have been excluded from the regional estimates but are included in total more developed regions

Source: Shah I, Ahman E.. IJGO (accepted for publication)
Why FIGO and WHO favors greater access to safe abortion services

- Unsafe Abortions cause suffering and deaths

- Criminalization of abortion only increases mortality, without decreasing the incidence of induced abortions
The effects of the criminalization of abortion in Romania in November 1965 on the abortion-related mortality and overall maternal mortality

Source: Stephenson et al., 1992; WHO, 1997
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Abortion rate (per one thousand women 15-45 years) are greater in countries with restrictive abortion laws
Abortion rate by sub-region (per 1000 women 15-44) according to prevalence of liberal abortion laws.

Source: Sedgh et al., 2012
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• Decriminalization dramatically reduces mortality
Abortion related deaths before and after legalization in South Africa

Abortion related deaths in public hospitals per year

- 1994 (before) 425
- 1998-2001 36

Diff. before/after: -91%

Fuente: Jewkes & Rees, 2005
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• Decriminalization does not increase abortion rate
Evolution of abortion rate after legalization in France

Evolution of abortion rate after legalization in France and Italy

Proportion of pregnancies ended in induced abortion after legalization in Turkey
Results of liberalization of abortion laws to facilitate access to safe abortion

The reduction in the abortion rates are explained because legal, institutional terminations of pregnancy provides with an opportunity for Family Planning counseling and provision of effective contraception.
Results of liberalization of abortion laws

Women with induced abortion have the highest risk of inducing another abortion if pregnant again.

As about half of the abortions are repeated, if they are reduced, the abortion rate falls

That is why post-abortion contraception is so important
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- *The people is not in favor of penalizing women who abort*
People’s opinion about punishing women who abort

- The results depend on how you formulate the question
Percentage of public servants in favor of more liberal abortion law, asked in abstract (n=1.660)
Percentage of public servants in favor of NOT punishing any woman who aborts (n=1.660)

- Any: 5.3%
- Mental health risk: 27%
- Woman who provokes abortion should not be punished: 61%
Percentage of public servants in favor of NOT punishing a woman they know who aborts (n=1.660)

- Any: 5.3% (n=1.640)
- Mental health risk: 27% (n=1.205)
- Woman who provokes abortion should not be punished: 61% (n=1.547)
- Known woman who provokes abortion should not be punished: 87.5% (n=952)
Percentage of religious and non-religious public servants in favor of NOT punishing any woman who aborts

- Any: 1.7% (Religious), 7.8% (Non-religious)
- Severe mental health risk: 11.9% (Religious), 37.4% (Non-religious)
- Woman who provokes abortion should not be punished: 57.2% (Religious), 64.2% (Non-religious)
- Known woman who provokes abortion should not be punished: 84% (Religious), 89.5% (Non-religious)

* p < 0.001  # p < 0.01
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- Decriminalization does not increase abortion rate
- The people is not in favor of penalizing women who abort
- *Physicians are afraid of the stigma, but accept the abortion for themselves or those close to them*
Porcentage of gynecologists-obstetricians who agree that abortion should not be a crime in certain circumstances. Brasil

* Circumstance presented only in 2005
Behavior of Gyneco-obstetricians confronted with a request of legal abortion after rape, at a Public Hospital. Brazil, 2005 (N = 2,788)

- 49.9% asked somebody else to do it
- 35% prescribed misoprostol
- 15.1% did the abortion
Did you help a client or family member to have an abortion:

✓ Recommended a colleague known to do safe abortions
✓ Taught to use misoprostol
✓ Did the abortion
In case of unwanted pregnancy, percentage of gyneco-obstetricians who helped a client or family member to have an abortion:

- Client: 38.2%
- Family: 42.2%
Survey among Brazilian Gynecologists-Obstetricians

✓ At anytime you or your partner ha and absolutely unwanted pregnancy?

✓ Did you or your partner had an abortion?
In case of unwanted pregnancy, percentage of Gynecology-Obstetricians who helped a client or family member, herself or his partner to have an abortion:

- Client: 38.2%
- Family: 42.2%
- Herself: 78.9%
- Partner: 80.1%
In case of unwanted pregnancy, percentage of Gynecologist-Obstetricians who helped a client or family member, herself or his partner to have an abortion, according to relevance given to religion.
What is required for a better understanding of provision of safe abortion

1. To make clear that it is not promoting abortion and there will not be less abortion if women are punished

2. Recognize that the fetus exists and has moral value

3. To establish clear limits of gestational age
What is required for a better understanding of provision of safe abortion

4. Establish the conditions when abortion is permitted

5. Promote, at the same time, the interventions with proven capacity to reduce abortions
THE FIGO POSITION ON UNSAFE ABORTION
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THANK YOU VERY MUCH