

# *Hundreds protest Ecuador's new anti-abortion bill in Quito*

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Quito, September 21 (RHC)-- Hundreds of women and men of all ages are protesting in Quito, Ecuador, against a recent law which prevents safe, free and legal abortion in cases of rape.

"We want the President of the Republic to veto the norm that prevents abortion in cases of rape because we want to stop forcing women and girls to give birth to children conceived with violence," activist Carolina Peña said.

On Friday afternoon, human rights, gender and social organizations gathered near the National Assembly at El Ejido Park, where activists addressed the authorities through a manifesto that was read to the public.

"In Ecuador, seven raped girls under the age of 14 are forced to give birth everyday. They are thus doomed to a life full of physical and psychological suffering. Victims of sexual violence are denied access to justice and a dignified life," said Carolina Loachamin, holding back her tears.

On September 19, Ecuador's National Assembly rejected a legal reform that would have allowed free, safe and legal abortion in cases of rape. This legislative decision immediately prompted an unusual citizen rejection, for there were only six votes left to protect women's rights.

However, these votes were not viable because several politicians did not attend the session where the future of thousands of Ecuadorian women was decided.???????

Among those who participated in this political maneuver were congresswomen and "progressive" politicians who had previously said they would support abortion in case of rape.

"Lawmayers, you could have guaranteed access to justice for victims of sexual violence; however, you didn't do it. Instead you decided to wash your hands with the blood of women who die in clandestine abortions and girls who die because their bodies cannot give birth."

After reading the manifesto, the Ecuadorean activists marched to the official residence of President Lenin Moreno, who has legal power to veto the National Assembly's decision.

"She was a virgin, a priest raped her and now the State says she is to blame. Get your rosaries out of our ovaries" and "You are not pro-life, you are anti-rights", were some of the screams that hundreds chanted.

According to official data, Ecuador witnessed at least 2,180 rape cases of girls under 14, pregnant and forced to give birth in the last year. ???????

As a result, their lives changed dramatically starting with the fact that these pregnant children are often forced to stop attending educational institutions.

"Raped and pregnant women should have the legal opportunity to decide whether they want to have their child or not," Peña added.

"They are not mothers, they are raped girls", "Mothers by decision, not by rape" and "I don't force you to abort, you don't force me to give birth" were some of the messages delivered through banners.

"Between 2015 and 2018 nearly 14,000 cases of rape were reported, 718 of them of girls under 10 years old, while between 2008 and 2018, more than 20,000 girls under 14 – Ecuador's age of consent – have given birth," Silvana Tapia, a PhD in Socio-Legal Studies, tweeted.

When the human rights defenders arrived in downtown Quito, the anti-riot police prevented them from approaching the presidential palace. In order to counteract the effect of tear gas, protesters burned papers in the streets.

For hours, scenes of police repression were repeated without making demonstrators give up their intention to reach the Central Square, a historic site where civil power shares territory with the Archbishopric of Ecuador.

There, where the relationship between the Church and the State acquires a highly visual expression, people remained chanting "Never again, never again."???????

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