



## **Model United Nations of Hamburg 2023**

**Forum: Commission on the Status of Women**

**Question of: Protecting women's bodily autonomy rights with a special focus on abortion**

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### **I. Description of the Issue**

Protecting women's bodily autonomy rights is a critical aspect of ensuring gender equality and reproductive justice. The issue of abortion has been a contentious topic in many societies, with debates revolving around the topic of the right of women to make decisions about their own bodies.

The concept of bodily autonomy refers to an individual's right to have control over their own body, including the right to make decisions regarding their reproductive health. Recognizing and respecting women's body autonomy is fundamental to upholding their human rights and ensuring their full participation in society. However, the issue of abortion raises complex ethical, moral, and legal considerations that vary across different cultural, religious, and political levels.

Abortion, as a medical procedure to terminate a pregnancy, has been subject to intense debate worldwide. Advocates argue that access to safe and legal abortion is essential for women's reproductive health, as it allows them to make informed choices about their bodies, lives, and futures. It enables women to exercise their right to decide whether and when or if they want to become mothers, taking into account factors such as their health, economic circumstances, and personal aspirations.

On the other hand, are opponents of abortions often basing their arguments on religious, moral, or philosophical grounds, asserting the rights of the unborn fetus. They argue for



restrictions on abortion access, citing the protection of potential life and promoting alternative options such as adoption. These differing perspectives have led to a complex and polarized discourse surrounding the issue of abortion and women's bodily autonomy.

## **II. Description of Key Terms**

**Bodily Autonomy:**

Bodily autonomy refers to the right of individuals to have control over their own body, including the right to make a decision about their reproductive health without interference or coercion from third parties.

**Abortion:**

Abortion refers to a medical procedure of terminating a pregnancy, either through medication or surgical intervention.

**Reproductive justice:**

Reproductive justice emphasizes the intersectionality of reproductive rights with other social justice issues, such as race, class, and gender. It advocates for equal access to reproductive healthcare and decision-making without discrimination or barriers.

**Reproductive Healthcare:**

Reproductive health care encompasses a range of services that support individuals' reproductive well being, including help with family planning, prenatal care, abortion, and post-abortion care.

**Stigma:**



Stigma refers to social disapproval/negative attitudes/discrimination associated with certain behaviors or conditions. In the context of abortion, stigma can create barriers to accessing safe and legal services and can negatively impact women's mental health and well being.

Reproductive Coercion:

Reproductive coercion refers to situations where individuals are pressured or forced into making decisions about their reproductive health against their will, violating their bodily autonomy and rights.

### **III. Background Information**

Global Abortion Rates: According to the World Health Organization (WHO), an estimated 73.3 million abortions occurred worldwide each year between 2015 and 2019. The global abortion rate was 39 per 1,000 women aged 15-49 during the same period.

Unsafe Abortions: The WHO reports that approximately 35 million abortions (or nearly half of all abortions) were considered unsafe globally each year between 2015 and 2019. Unsafe abortions can lead to complications, including maternal morbidity and mortality.

Legal Frameworks: The legal status of abortion varies significantly across countries. Some countries have highly restrictive abortion laws, while others allow for broader access. As of September 2021, about 42% of the world's population lives in countries with highly restrictive abortion laws, where abortion is prohibited or only allowed to save a woman's life or preserve her physical health.

Impact of Restrictive Abortion Laws: Restrictive abortion laws can lead to an increase in unsafe abortions and related health risks for women. According to a study published in The



Lancet, countries with more restrictive abortion laws tend to have higher rates of unsafe abortions and maternal mortality. In contrast, countries with legal and accessible abortion services have lower rates of unsafe abortions and improved maternal health outcomes.

**Barriers to Access:** Various barriers hinder women's access to safe and legal abortion services. These barriers include legal restrictions, limited availability of services, financial constraints, stigma, lack of information, and cultural or religious beliefs. Lack of access to safe abortion care can result in women resorting to unsafe methods, increasing the risk of complications and maternal mortality.

**Reproductive Justice and Intersectionality:** The concept of reproductive justice acknowledges the intersectionality of reproductive rights with other social justice issues, such as race, socioeconomic status, and gender identity. Marginalized groups, including women of color, low-income women, and LGBTQ+ individuals, often face disproportionate barriers to accessing safe and legal abortion services, thus exacerbating health disparities.

**Health Benefits of Accessible Abortion Services:** Access to safe and legal abortion services is associated with positive health outcomes for women. According to the Guttmacher Institute, countries with liberal abortion laws tend to have lower rates of maternal mortality, lower infant mortality rates, and better overall reproductive health outcomes for women.

**Impact of Comprehensive Sexual and Reproductive Education:** Comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education programs have been shown to be effective in reducing unintended pregnancies and abortion rates. Providing accurate information about contraception, family planning, and safe abortion options empowers individuals to make informed decisions about their reproductive health.

#### **IV. Major Countries and Organizations involved**

Canada:



The Canadian government has implemented policies and legislation that aim to protect women's reproductive rights, including access to safe and legal abortion services.

#### Sweden:

Sweden is known for its progressive approach to reproductive rights, including access to safe and legal abortion services. The Swedish government actively supports and promotes women's bodily autonomy.

#### Uruguay:

Uruguay has implemented progressive policies to protect women's reproductive rights, including the decriminalization of abortion and the provision of accessible and safe abortion services.

#### South Africa:

South Africa has one of the most liberal abortion laws in Africa, allowing for safe and legal abortions upon request. The government has made efforts to ensure access to comprehensive reproductive healthcare, including abortion services.

#### United States of America:

The United States of America had a supreme court decision (Roe v Wade) from 1973 in which the Court ruled that the Constitution of the United States generally protects a pregnant individual's liberty to have an abortion. This Decision got overruled by the supreme court in 2022 since then it is up to the individual state of the US to put restrictions on abortions or not through which in the more conservative part of the US many states forbid or limited the access to abortions by a lot.

#### Afghanistan:



Since the Taliban have taken over Afghanistan and put the Sharia laws back into place abortions are illegal in Afghanistan but are still performed illegally which often leads to tremendous injuries or infections of the women.

#### India:

Since 2021 a law has been put in place allowing women to autonomously choose if they want to have an abortion or not if the birth of the child would threaten her life, before that this was only allowed to married women.

#### Japan:

In Japan, abortions are legal until the 22 week of the pregnancy but only if the child was conceived during a rape, when the health of the pregnant woman is at risk or the mother would not be able to handle the pregnancy or the child financially.

#### France:

France has laws in place that protect women's reproductive rights, including access to safe and legal abortion services. The government works to ensure women's bodily autonomy and promotes reproductive health and education.

#### NGOs:

##### International Women's Health Coalition (IWHC):

IWHC works globally to advance women's reproductive rights and bodily autonomy. They collaborate with local organizations, advocate for policy change, and support women's access to comprehensive reproductive healthcare.

##### National Abortion Federation (NAF):

NAF is a professional association and advocacy organization that represents abortion providers in the United States and Canada. They promote access to quality abortion care,



advocate for policies that protect women's reproductive rights, and provide resources for healthcare providers.

Amnesty International:

Amnesty International is a global human rights organization that works to protect and promote human rights worldwide. They advocate for women's bodily autonomy and reproductive rights, including access to safe and legal abortion services.

**I. Timeline of Events**

1960	The first oral contraceptive is invented and approved by the US's FDA.
1969	The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) is created.
1984	The US institutes the "global gag rule". A.k.a. the Mexico City Policy, this dangerous policy prevents US aid and support for international organizations and partners whose work involves abortion
1993-1995	violence against women (VAW) is finally recognized as a human rights violation; the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) is created
2010	UN Women is created



2012	The UN passes the first resolution calling for a ban on female genital mutilation (FGM) worldwide. In the same year, Somalia officially bans FGM, and three years later, so does Africa's most populous country, Nigeria.
2018-2022	Protests against Poland's restrictive abortion laws begin.
2022	Global protests against the overturning of Roe v. Wade in the US
2023	The Taliban ceases the sale of contraceptives in Afghanistan, stopping birth control and higher education for women and girls

## **VI. Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue**

International agreements and conventions:

International agreements and conventions have addressed women's bodily autonomy and reproductive rights. For example, the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) have recognized women's rights to reproductive health and access to safe abortion services.

Awareness and education campaigns:

Awareness raising and education campaigns aim to educate the public about women's bodily autonomy and the importance of safe and legal abortion services. These campaigns aim to dispel myths, combat stigma and promote understanding and support for reproductive rights.

## **VI. Possible Solutions**

Legal Reforms and Decriminalization:





Review and reform existing laws to decriminalize abortion and ensure that women have the right to make decisions about their own bodies without fear of legal repercussions. This includes removing restrictive regulations, such as mandatory waiting periods and parental consent requirements.

#### Access to Safe and Legal Abortion Services:

Improve access to safe and legal abortion services, including ensuring the availability of trained healthcare providers, affordable and accessible clinics, and appropriate facilities. This may involve expanding the number of healthcare providers who can perform abortions and ensuring that clinics are located in areas with limited access. But this can only be achieved if comprehensive reproductive health education in that region is given.

#### Comprehensive Reproductive Health Education:

Implement comprehensive and evidence-based sexual and reproductive health education programs that provide accurate information about contraception, family planning, and safe abortion options. This education should be accessible to individuals of all ages and genders, promoting informed decision-making and empowering individuals to exercise their reproductive rights.

#### Addressing Stigma and Discrimination:

Combat the stigma and discrimination surrounding abortion by promoting open and non-judgmental discussions about reproductive choices. This can be done through public awareness campaigns, media engagement, and community dialogues to challenge misconceptions and promote acceptance.

#### International Collaboration and Cooperation:

Foster international collaboration among governments, NGOs, and international organizations to share best practices, resources, and expertise in protecting women's bodily



autonomy rights. This collaboration can help promote global standards and advocate for reproductive rights on an international scale.

### **VIII. Questions Delegates Should Consider during Research**

In order to debate this subject, all delegates should be aware of the importance of providing equal opportunities through quality education. The delegates need to be educated about their countries' current situation/status, including social, economic, and political aspects. More precisely, all delegations shall be aware of the effect they may or may not have on the issue, and need to know about initiatives and laws established. Moreover, it is also important to take an exact look at the position of other countries, since that will help in the debates. As a delegate, strive to always establish new and improved solutions for your country, but above all for the world.

- What are the current laws in place in my country referring to women's autonomous rights, with an emphasis on abortion?
- What is the public's opinion on women's autonomous rights?
- What religions and cultural background does my country have?
- Is my country in alliance with countries with differentiating views on the topic of women's autonomous rights?
- How many women are endangered by performing illegal abortions on their own, and what are the reasons they have to retract to such desperate measures?

### **IX. Relevant UN Treaties and Events**

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW):  
This treaty, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979, aims to eliminate discrimination against women and ensure their equal rights in various spheres, including reproductive rights.  
<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/cedaw.pdf>

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):



The SDGs, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2015, include several goals and targets that relate to gender equality, women's empowerment, and reproductive health. Goal 5 specifically addresses achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls, which encompasses the right to bodily autonomy and access to reproductive healthcare.

<https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal5>

HRC Resolution 34/3 on Preventable Maternal Mortality and Morbidity:

This resolution, adopted by the UN Human Rights Council in 2017, addresses preventable maternal mortality and morbidity, emphasizing the importance of sexual and reproductive health and rights, including access to safe and legal abortion services.

<https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G17/085/87/PDF/G1708587.pdf?OpenElement>

#### **X. Useful links and sources**

International Women's Health Coalition (IWHC):

<https://iwhc.org/>

Guttmacher Institute:

<https://www.guttmacher.org/>

Center for Reproductive Rights:

<https://reproductiverights.org/>

Women on Waves:

<https://www.womenonwaves.org/>

Reproductive Health Access Project (RHAP):

<https://www.reproductiveaccess.org/>

UN website:



<https://www.un.org/>

## **XI. Epilogue**

To ensure comprehensive coverage of the forum's topics, each delegate is required to write at least **one draft resolution and a minimum of two, position papers**. These documents are crucial for meaningful discussions and effective problem-solving. Please submit all draft resolutions and position papers by the **deadline of 09/08/23**. Late submissions will not be eligible for correction or consideration in decision-making processes.

Speaking of awards, we will be recognizing the **best and most distinguished delegate**, as well as the **best first-timer** in the committee. These awards aim to acknowledge outstanding leadership and diplomatic skills. Strive for excellence and demonstrate your abilities in your role.

I am excited to read your position papers and witness your research and preparation. If you have any questions or if there are any uncertainties feel free to reach out to me. I wish you success in your preparations for the conference and am really excited to get to know all of you!

Kind regards,

**Tim Haaso**

(President of the General Assembly)