

Call to Action: Pass Sierra Leone's Safe Abortion Act

What is the current situation?

On 8 December 2015, the Parliament of Sierra Leone passed the Safe Abortion Act 2015, tabled by ruling party lawmaker Hon. Isatu Kabia.

Although the Bill was due to be signed into law imminently after pressure from the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone the President has sent it back to Parliament for reconsideration. The Parliamentary leadership will now be discussing the Bill with religious leaders and the full Parliament will likely reconsider whether to sign the Bill into law or withdraw it completely.

This Act would replace an antiquated 150-year-old colonial law and was developed in consultation with a broad range of medical, legal and human rights professionals.

This is an historic opportunity for the future of Sierra Leone.

For too long we have seen our girls and young women die from the devastating effects of unsafe abortion – we have lost wives, daughters and sisters. The government need to deliver on their promises and ensure that this Act is passed.

**Ufuoma Omo-Obi, Country Director,
Marie Stopes Sierra Leone**



Why should the Safe Abortion Act be passed?

- It would save lives and make a profound **difference to the future of women and girls across the country**. Ending the silent pandemic of unsafe abortion is an urgent public health priority for Sierra Leone. In South Africa six years after reforming its law, deaths from unsafe abortion had dropped by 50%.
- **Sierra Leone has the world's highest maternal mortality ratio**. Complications and deaths from unsafe abortions are common, often carried out by untrained providers in unhygienic and dangerous conditions. After decades of violent conflict and the recent Ebola crisis the country cannot afford to lose any more of its young women and girls to preventable deaths.
- **Withdrawing this Bill would not reduce the number of abortions that occur in Sierra Leone it would just continue to make them unsafe**. As the World Health Organisation notes, 'The legal status of abortion has no effect on a woman's need for an abortion, but it dramatically affects her access to safe abortion.'
- **Unsafe abortion puts a huge burden on an already stretched health system** which is heavily dependent on international aid. The government spends \$112,000 – \$230,000 each year on the personnel and medical supplies needed to treat post abortion cases.
- **Unsafe abortion is particularly high amongst girls and young women** with 50% of young women married by 18 and poor access to information and services (unmet need for contraception is 30%).
- **Sierra Leone has signed or ratified almost all international treaties and optional protocols designed to protect human rights**, including the Maputo Plan of Action, which specifically calls for countries to protect women's health and rights by increasing access to safe abortion.

Unsafe abortion is one of the main causes of maternal mortality that can be most easily addressed, through improved access to family planning, information and services, safe, legal abortion services and high-quality post abortion care.

Hon. Isatu Kabia MP