

Girls win! Landmark ruling demands that Ecuador and Nicaragua ensure that no girl is forced into motherhood



Photo credit: Planned Parenthood Global.

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- Responding to the demands of the “Son Niñas, No Madres” (Girls, Not Mothers) Movement*, **the United Nations Human Rights Committee found the States of Ecuador and Nicaragua responsible for violating the human rights of three girls, survivors of rape, who were denied access to abortion.**
- These decisions **set a new global standard for reproductive rights**, mandating that States worldwide amend their legislation to ensure access to abortion and to prevent girls from enduring forced pregnancies and motherhood.
- **The Girls, Not Mothers Movement celebrates this unprecedented decision to prevent girls from being forced into motherhood.**

On January 20th, 2025, the United Nations Human Rights Committee issued three landmark decisions holding the States of Ecuador and Nicaragua responsible for the human rights violations of three Latin American girls, survivors of rape, who were forced into motherhood. The Committee recognized that girls should be just that: girls, not mothers.

The rulings are the culmination of an international litigation strategy launched in 2019 by the “Niñas, No Madres” (“Girls, Not Mothers”) Movement, a coalition of more than a dozen organizations working to raise awareness about the severe impacts of sexual violence and forced motherhood on Latin American girls and to advocate for their rights.

The rulings issued by the UN Human Rights Committee are mandatory and urge the defendant States to implement reparative actions for the victims and establish safeguards to prevent any other girls from experiencing similar outcomes. Furthermore, these rulings pave the way for extending the justice achieved by Norma, Susana, and Lucía to thousands of girls worldwide, as the international jurisprudence of these decisions applies to over 170 State parties to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

The UN Human Rights Committee recognized that Ecuador and Nicaragua violated the survivors' rights to life and to a dignified life, access to effective justice, freedom from torture and cruel or inhuman treatment, privacy, information, and equality without discrimination.

As a result of these decisions, the Committee reaffirmed that States must ensure access to abortion and remove all barriers so that girls, women, and all individuals can access this essential health service, specially in cases of sexual violence or where pregnancy poses a risk to life or health. Likewise, the Committee urged States to eliminate all barriers to women and girls' effective access to justice and recalled that, when it comes to girls, impunity is an aggravating circumstance.

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These rulings are historic because, for the first time, the Committee recognizes that forced motherhood interrupts and obstructs personal, familial, educational, and professional goals; severely restricts girls' life projects; and infringes upon their right to a dignified life. Moreover, it explicitly stated that denying access to reproductive healthcare services reinforces gender stereotypes based on women's reproductive roles and constitutes a form of intersectional discrimination based on gender and age.

What do these rulings demand, and how do they confront a critical issue in the region?

These cases reflect the widespread lack of protection and the violence inflicted on girls across the region. They are the faces of a growing epidemic in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The region has the world's second-highest rate of births among girls under 15, according to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA, 2022). UNFPA estimates that, in 2021, 5 out of every 100 girls in Latin America and the Caribbean became mothers.

Around 20% of these pregnancies are the result of sexual violence, mainly against girls, who often suffer repeated assaults. It is estimated that 80% of rapes involves a girl between 10 and 14 years old (IACHR, 2019).

Compounding the picture described above, **maternal mortality is one of the leading causes of death in girls and adolescents in the Americas (PAHO, 2017)**.

Norma, Susana and Lucía have shared their stories to help other survivors like them make their own life choices and overcome violence. Based on their cases, and in response to a structural problem in Latin America, the UN Human Rights Committee established historic standards that will now be applied globally. Here are some of most important standards:

1. Amending legislation to ensure access to safe, legal, and effective abortion, especially in cases involving sexual violence or risks to the life or health of the girls, women, or pregnant person. This includes providing comprehensive healthcare services, including abortion, and removing all access barriers.
2. To take action to combat sexual violence in all sectors, including educational and awareness-raising initiatives to prevent, address, and prosecute these cases, as well as providing comprehensive remedies for survivors.
3. To provide training to healthcare professionals and justice operators on comprehensive care for victims of sexual violence, and to guarantee effective responses in cases involving individuals with a history of similar offenses.
4. To implement individual reparation measures, such as compensation for survivors, support to resume their studies, psychological counseling, and other measures that allow them to resume their life projects and achieve their educational, professional, and family goals, previously interrupted by forced motherhood.

"We have decided to call these historic rulings 'The Girls, Not Mothers Decisions' because we want people to know them and recognize that they result from the courage of Norma, Susana, and Lucía. Above all, we seek to guarantee what they

demand: that no girl should ever be forced to abandon her childhood due to forced pregnancies and forced motherhood, and that they have the right to a dignified life free from violence," said the organizations part of the movement: Surkuna (Ecuador), Mujeres Transformando el Mundo (Guatemala), and Promsex (Peru).

"These rulings are a global victory for the feminist fight for reproductive autonomy, in this case, on behalf of girls who are survivors of sexual violence. When forced to become mothers, these girls are not only re-victimized, but their health and life plans are also put at risk. Abortion is an essential healthcare service and must be guaranteed as such," declared Catalina Martínez Coral, Regional Vice President for Latin America at the Center for Reproductive Rights, one of the co-litigating organizations within the movement.

"The international legal system has prioritized the needs of girls, especially those facing the greatest barriers or left with no options due to restrictive laws that subject them to forced motherhood. Now more than ever, we will continue providing tools so everyone can demand accountability from the defendant States regarding their progress in implementation," added Marianny Sánchez, Communications Director for Latin America at Planned Parenthood Global, one of the movement's founding organizations.

The Son Niñas, No Madres movement urges the Ecuadorian government, and governments worldwide to safeguard the rights of all individuals, especially children. Ecuador must urgently develop a roadmap, in collaboration with civil society, to immediately implement these measures.

In light of the situation in Nicaragua, the Son Niñas No Madres movement urgently calls on the international community to demand that Nicaragua comply with these rulings and strengthen monitoring mechanisms. The State must provide verifiable and transparent data on the situation of girls and adolescents and to modify legal frameworks to guarantee reproductive rights and healthcare services, including voluntary termination of pregnancy.

The organizations that make up the Son Niñas No Madres movement reiterate their support for women and organizations that cannot raise their voices for fear of retaliation. We know there are many who share this cause, and despite the risks to their lives and integrity, continue to work so that girls remain just that: girls, not

mothers.

This decision is issued in addition to the decision issued by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child against Peru on 2023, also as a result of the international litigation strategy carried out by “Son Niñas No Madres” (They are Girls not Mothers) Movement, in the case of Camila who, at the age of 13, after suffering repeated rapes by her father for several years, was forced to continue her pregnancy and was subsequently criminalized after suffering a miscarriage.

***About the Girls Not Mothers Movement:** “Son Niñas, No Madres” (Girls, not Mothers) is a regional movement advocating for the rights of Latin American girls, leading the groundbreaking strategic litigation cases of Norma, Fatima, Susana and Lucia before the UN Human Rights Committee. The co-plaintiff organizations – the Center for Reproductive Rights (Global), Planned Parenthood Global (Global), Mujeres Transformando el Mundo (Guatemala), El Observatorio en Salud Sexual y Reproductiva (Guatemala), Surkuna (Ecuador) and Promsex (Peru) – collaborated on a joint litigation strategy to prevent such cases from reoccurring and to secure appropriate reparations. The movement aims to raise awareness about the severe consequences of sexual violence and forced motherhood on young girls. Founded by Planned Parenthood Global, Amnesty International, the Grupo de Información para la Reproducción Elegida (GIRE) and the Consorcio Latinoamericano contra el Aborto Inseguro (CLACAI) Girls Not Mothers now includes a dozen organizations from across the Americas. Together they work to ensure that all girls can grow up healthy, strong, and safe, with the freedom to make informed choices about their health and future.

Learn more about the cases on the podcast ‘Girls, Not Mothers’:
Spotify: <https://open.spotify.com/show/3CRfE5tXaOIHqWx0nECfUW>

Learn more about the movement:
Website: <https://www.ninasnomadres.org/>
Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/ninasnomadresla/>
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