

New Dominican law OKs abortion if life at risk

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Women hold signs outside Congress in support of legalizing abortion in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, Tuesday, Dec. 16, 2014. Congress approved on Tuesday a bill that de penalizes abortion when the mother's life is in danger. The bill should be ratified by the Senate. In cases of rape or if the fetus has severe birth defects, the abortion could be allowed, but it will depends of the approval of a new law. The signs read in Spanish, from left, "The President gave us back what was not agreed," and "Legislate according to a democratic state, not based on religious beliefs. " (AP Photo/Ezequiel Abiu Lopez)

The Dominican Republic on Friday approved a law that for the first time decriminalizes abortions if the mother's life is at risk.

The measure goes into effect late next year and is part of a new penal code that President Danilo Medina signed despite multiple protests.

Legislators have pledged that they will soon submit a separate bill to decriminalize abortions in cases of rape, incest or fetus malformation, something that Medina requested last month.

The new penal code also increases sentences from three to 10 years for doctors found guilty of assisting in abortions, except for those where the mother's life is at risk.

Religious groups denounced the newly approved measure and a group of legislators said they would file a complaint seeking to declare the new law unconstitutional, arguing it contains amendments that had not been analyzed or approved by the Senate. Abel Martinez, president of the Chamber of Deputies, denied the allegations.

Human rights groups estimate that nearly 85,000 clandestine abortions are performed every year in the Dominican Republic, with some 15,000 women being hospitalized in serious condition as a result.

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