

S.Africa HIV+ women forced to sterilise: rights groups

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Doctors at some public hospitals in South Africa have allegedly coerced dozens of HIV-positive women to undergo sterilisation over the past three decades, rights groups said Thursday.

The Women's Legal Centre, an independent local group, and the international Her Rights Initiative say they have received 48 complaints over coerced sterilisation that occurred between 1986 and last year.

The groups want the cases involving women aged between 18 and 44 years to be probed, a lawyer said.

"We are lodging... a complaint for the CGE (Commission for Gender Equality) to investigate the discrimination that HIV-positive women are facing," the groups' lawyer Jody Fredericks told AFP.

The most recently recorded case allegedly occurred last year, when a 25-year-old woman who had just given birth to her second baby was pressured into sterilisation.

"It all happened in [public hospitals](#)," said Fredericks.

Fredericks said the [rights groups](#) she represents want the constitutionally mandated CGE to lobby the government and to monitor the country's hospitals.

Condemning the coercions, the South African section of international

charity Oxfam tweeted: "End this violation on women's bodies! My body, my rights, my womb, my choices."

South Africa, which has the highest incidence of AIDS in the world, counts 6.4 million people or just under 10 percent of the population, living with HIV. New infections hover around 400,000 each year.

About one quarter of South Africans newly infected with HIV are girls and [women](#) between the ages of 15 and 24.

But thanks to the distribution of anti-retroviral (ARV) drugs, life expectancy has recovered dramatically in recent years, rising to 61 from 53 in 2006.

When HIV is detected during or before pregnancy, the risk of mother-to-child transmission can be reduced to less than one percent if the right treatment is given, according to the US health authorities.

South Africa will host the next global AIDS conference in the eastern port of Durban in July 2016.

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