

# Morocco king eases restrictions on abortion for incest, rape

May 16 2015, by Paul Schemm

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Moroccan King Mohammed VI has ordered that laws restricting abortion be loosened, allowing it in the case of rape, incest, danger to the mother's health or fetal malformation.

Debate erupted in this North African kingdom earlier this year over reforming the penal code, which banned [abortion](#) except in cases of a threat to the mother's life. The king had his justice minister, religious affairs minister and the head of the state human rights organization study the issue.

"Their consultations showed that a vast majority of society is for the criminalization of abortion with the exception of a few cases that would have negative medical, psychological and social repercussions on the woman, fetus, family and society," said a royal statement carried late Friday by the state news agency.

With the exception of Tunisia, where abortion is legal, the practice is highly restricted across the region, with occasional exceptions made for rape, incest or fetal malformations.

Despite the law, abortion is widespread in Morocco, with non-governmental organizations estimating that 600-800 illegal abortions are performed daily. Bearing a child out of wedlock in a conservative society like Morocco brings shame upon a woman and her family, resulting in women turning to abortion or abandoning infants.

The calls for reform were sparked in December when Dr. Chafik Chraibi, head of obstetrics at Rabat's Maternity hospital, was fired after he condemned the laws that forced abortion underground. His firing led to a debate among intellectuals and political party leaders, culminating in Chraibi's reinstatement and the king's launching of a committee in March to reform the law.

Some reform advocates had called for a much wider access to abortion to stem the recourse to illegal procedures.

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