



**THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY OF WOMEN LIVING WITH HIV GLOBAL STATEMENT TO
THE 58th COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN:
RECLAIM THE RIGHT TO MOTHERHOOD FOR WOMEN LIVING WITH HIV.**

The forced and coerced sterilization of women living with HIV is a serious violation of our fundamental human rights to bodily integrity, informed consent and to our rights as women to make our own reproductive choices. Forcible and coercive sterilization is a widespread form of institutionalized violence against women and a part of a systemic pattern of violations of the sexual and reproductive rights experienced globally by women living with HIV.

Women living with HIV from around the world have spoken out about the severe and persistent violations of sexual and reproductive health rights they face, ranging from the egregious violation of forced and coerced sterilization, to refusal to provide services, hostile attitudes towards women living with HIV who seek to have children, stigmatization at hospitals by hospital staff, breaches of confidentiality, and testing for HIV without informed consent. Many of these violations occur during the provision of health services and are perpetrated by health service personnel.

Since 2008, eighteen women living with HIV who were sterilized without their informed consent have filed lawsuits against the Government of Namibia. Forced sterilization violates numerous rights guaranteed under the Namibian Constitution and Namibia's obligations under international and regional law – including the right to be free from cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment; the right to liberty and security of person; the right to health and family planning; the right to privacy; and the right to equality and to be free from discrimination. With the support of the Namibia Women's Health Network, a part of the ICW Global Network, three of the cases were heard in court on July 30, 2012. In his ruling, Judge Hoff found that the women did not give their informed consent for the sterilization operation to be done. The women are still awaiting compensation.

The Namibian government has now filed an appeal against the High Court's ruling on all three cases. The hearing for the appeal has been set for the 17th of March at the Namibian Supreme Court and we are determined to hold the government accountable and put a stop to this inhumane practice in Namibia.

ICW calls upon CSW delegates and the international women's rights community, in solidarity with women living with HIV of Namibia, to strongly demand that the Government of Namibia and the Ministry of Health, at a minimum:

1. Withdraw their appeal and do not delay justice for the women living with HIV who have suffered these violations of their human rights.
2. Pay financial compensation to women who were sterilised without their informed consent.
3. Live up to their international human rights commitments to protect the sexual and reproductive rights of women living with HIV and embark on a meticulous investigation into the practice and take decisive steps to prevent future violations.
4. Adopt the International Federation of Gynaecology and Obstetrics (FIGO) guidelines on female contraceptive sterilization and ensure that these guidelines are implemented in all public and private health care centres including maternity hospitals.
5. Provide redress for all women who have experienced sterilization without their informed consent, including but not limited to the provision of specialised gynaecological, medical and psychological services for any women who were sterilised without their informed consent who wish to seek these services, provide comprehensive information about the procedures and methods of sterilization experienced by women and for women who have undergone non-permanent procedures, provide a fully funded option to get the procedures reversed, and provide opportunities for women living with HIV who have been forcibly sterilised to adopt children without bureaucratic barriers so that their right to motherhood shall be reclaimed.

Women living with HIV demand our fundamental human rights and reclaim our right to motherhood and to make informed choices about our reproductive health.

ICW has launched a petition where members of the international community can show support for our sisters in Namibia. We urge you to sign the petition - <https://www.change.org/petitions/the-government-of-namibia-and-the-ministry-of-health-stop-forced-and-coerced-sterilization-of-women-living-with-hiv#>