

**www.ghanaweb.com: General News of Sunday, 26 March 2006**

## **Calls to review strict laws on Abortion**

Addis Ababa, March 26, GNA - Professor Fred T. Sai, Ghana's Presidential Advisor on Population Issues and HIV/AIDS, has called for the review and abolition of archaic laws that allowed abortion to become the killing field for women in Africa. He said many African women continued to die from unsafe abortion due to the strict laws and "the fact that 30,000 women die each year of unsafe abortion, four million Africa women continue to undergo unsafe abortion and millions getting injured, then, it is serious and urgent action should be taken."

Prof. Sai made the call when interacting with Journalists during the Africa Regional Consultation on Abortion Research in Africa in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The Consultation under the theme; "Linking Research to Action to end unsafe abortion in Africa and save women's lives" brought together over 120 researchers, health professionals and policy makers. Prof. Sai, Chairman for the Consultation said, "By continuing to adhere to the archaic laws, by failing to implement international agreements, and by failing to act on growing evidence we will be killing more women through unsafe abortion. We know what to do to save women's lives and it is time to work together to make that happen." He expressed dismay that there was nowhere in the laws of African countries that criminalized the womb of women adding that "why do we then allow our women who are the bedrock of our nations to go through these ordeal and described as the worse form of medical apartheid."

According to Prof. Sai, abortion caused 30-40 per cent of maternal mortality in Africa and to reduce maternal mortality by 75 per cent to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015, rate of unsafe abortion should be reduced drastically. He called for equity in the laws to enable poor women also have the same access to safe abortion care like their fellow rich women and this would reduce the rate and "we will achieve the MDGs."

Citing Ghana as an example, Prof. Sai said there were many doctors who were ignorant of the law under which circumstances safe abortion should be conducted and said Ghana's example was not different from other African countries. The Ghana Abortion Law, Criminal Code, 1960 (Act 29), section 58, subsection 2 says where the pregnancy is the result of rape, defilement of a female idiot or incest and the abortion or miscarriage is requested by the victim or her next of kin or person in loco parentis, if she lacks the capacity to make such consent request:

Where the continuance of the pregnancy would involve risk to the life of the pregnant woman or injury to her physical or mental health and such a woman consents to it or she lacks the capacity to give such consent it is given on her behalf by her next of kin or the person in loco parentis; or Where there is substantial risk that if the child was born, it may suffer from or develop a serious physical abnormality or disease. Prof. Sai called on researchers and policy makers to consider it as a matter of urgency and review laws to make abortion safe and legal to save more women from resorting to unsafe abortion and die due to the strict laws of their countries.

Dr Sharon Camp, President of Guttmacher Institute, a non-governmental organization, described the problem as an emergency and said a consortium would be put together to raise money to conduct more research that would effect change and reduce the rate of death through unsafe abortion. She said whilst rich women had access to safe abortion, women in poor countries across Africa and the developing world did not have the same equal access to safe abortion and described it as "injustice." Dr Camp reiterated the need for countries that had strict abortion laws to review them and those who did not have institute them as a matter of urgency.

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**Source:** GNA