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WOMEN'S RIGHTS GROUPS

African women ask for safer abortions in Ethiopian conference

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More than 120 researchers, health-care professionals and policy makers held a three-day conference in Ethiopia to discuss ways to liberalize attitudes, laws and accessibility to safe abortions in Africa.

A coalition of women's rights groups and activists pledged Friday to do more to make safe abortions available in Africa and called for more research into unsafe abortion and maternal mortality.

More than 120 researchers, health-care professionals and policy makers from around the world held a three-day conference in Ethiopia to discuss ways to liberalize attitudes, laws and accessibility to safe abortions in Africa, where 44 percent of the world's deaths due to abortion take place, according to the Geneva-based World Health Organization.

"This is the worst case of medical apartheid that exists," Dr. Fred Sai told journalists in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa at the close of the conference on Thursday.

In Ethiopia, where long-standing, religious codes carry powerful social weight, abortion laws have been eased, according to the U.S. advocacy institute Center for American Progress.

Ethiopia is also the second-most populated nation on the African continent, after Nigeria, with more than 70 million people. But experts agree that more needs to be done, even in Ethiopia.

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