

El Salvador Woman Has Caesarean to Avoid Abortion, Baby Dies

The pregnant woman at the center of an abortion controversy in El Salvador had her malformed fetus delivered on Monday by Caesarean section to save her life and avoid breaking the law, although the baby did not survive.

El Salvador's Health Ministry said doctors attending the woman, who uses the name "Beatriz" to protect her identity, performed a Caesarean to remove the fetus, thereby avoiding an abortion, which is illegal in the country.

The Central American country banned all types of **abortion** in 1999, but Beatriz's fetus had a serious condition known as anencephaly, which results in only partial brain development. Such a fetus has little or no chance of surviving after birth.

Health Minister Maria Isabel Rodriguez said the operation took place about 2 p.m. (2000 GMT) and that Beatriz, who had been 27 weeks pregnant, was in stable condition.

"She's in good hands, being looked after well," she told Reuters. "I expect things to go well over the next few hours."

Shortly afterward, Rodriguez said that Beatriz's baby daughter died about five hours after the operation.

Beatriz, 22, suffers from lupus and kidney problems, which posed a serious threat to her own health.

The operation followed a non-binding resolution on Thursday by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights that called on El Salvador to take action to save Beatriz's life after the country's courts had denied her an **abortion**.

El Salvador's Supreme Court rejected Beatriz's request for an abortion on the grounds it breached the constitution, which it said protects life from the moment of conception.

The Caesarean delivery provided El Salvador with a way out of the legal wrangle.

Morena Herrera, a spokeswoman for the abortion rights group Colectivo Feminista, said that although Beatriz could have been spared unnecessary suffering, her life had been saved.

Claudia Handal, a spokeswoman for the anti-abortion group Red Familia, said the rights of all had been respected.

"We're very happy because as we said from the beginning, it wasn't necessary to perform an abortion, the point was to respect the baby's life and to give Beatriz the care and the right to health that she deserved," Handal told Reuters.

The case has drawn attention to abortion in El Salvador and attitudes toward the procedure in predominantly Roman Catholic Latin America. Some countries such as Colombia are relaxing their rules in order to permit abortions in cases of rape.

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