



IPG STATEMENT ON RECENT ATTACKS ON WOMEN’S RIGHTS IN THE USA

Released 7 September 2021

The IPG expresses its concern regarding Texas anti-abortion law SB 8, which drastically curtails the right of Texas women to control their own bodies. The law bans abortion at as early as six weeks (when a fetal heartbeat is usually detected), with no exceptions for cases of rape and incest. The law further *deputizes ordinary citizens rather than state agents as enforcers of the law*, offering \$10,000 plus legal fees for each person who successfully sues someone for “aiding and abetting” abortion, including in the most indirect ways imaginable (such as driving a woman to a health clinic).

The law effectively targets all women and girls of childbearing age in Texas, thrusting them into a space of terror in which they have lost sovereign control over their bodies not only to the state but also to fellow citizens, who will be able to harass and persecute them at will by targeting everyone around them.

The law will have deleterious effects on women’s ability to pursue ordinary daily tasks, whether or not they are pregnant. Since there is no way to tell from observation that a woman is pregnant at six weeks, ordinary things, such as transporting any women in a taxicab or rideshare, could potentially put a person at risk of a lawsuit for aiding and abetting. In such a situation, women effectively will become branded as potential liabilities.

On a broad scale, this law serves to radically and immediately marginalize a protected group -- one half of Texas citizens -- from the rest of society, cutting them off from the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the US Constitution. This is particularly the case since the USA does not guarantee citizens’ rights to health care, paid parental leave, housing, a living wage, childcare, or higher education, such that individual women alone are unconstitutionally saddled with the discriminatory consequences of anti-abortion laws. Any person who seeks to help this marginalized group (women) will be facing possible impoverishment through the US judicial system.

The law went into effect in Texas on September 1, after which the US Supreme Court refused to block it. While the law will still face legal scrutiny in the lower courts, it currently offers cover for any individual citizen seeking to enrich themselves through legal harassment of women. The move by the Supreme Court shows the extent to which the highest judicial institution of the country is in the hands of a conservative minority out of step with both the American public and democratic values.

HB 8 should be of serious concern to American citizens not only for its autocratic and unconstitutional nature, but also for its ability to radicalize American society further towards the totalitarian right.

As we have noted in previous statements, *state efforts to backtrack on women's rights signal a political shift towards extremism that puts nations at increased risk for mass atrocity*. Women become the first victims of totalitarian exclusionary tactics that are normalized and then applied to other groups.

We remind US Supreme Court justices, US Republican legislators, and the American people that *all genocidal regimes in history have sought to exercise control over women's bodies through usurping their right to bodily sovereignty*. HB 8 signals that a majority of judges on the highest court in the land is prepared to take the United States down this dark path. We support US President Biden's call for a "whole of government" response to this law and urge US legislators to view this response through the lens of genocide prevention as well as women's human rights.