

Brazil doctor group urges legalization of abortion

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A group representing Brazilian doctors on Thursday urged federal lawmakers to change the country's restrictive abortion law to allow abortions during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy.

At a news conference, the head of the Federal Council of Medicine said the high number of botched illegal abortions and their sometimes tragic consequences were behind the recommendation, the first of its kind by the umbrella group representing around 400,000 doctors in Brazil.

Brazil, which is the world's most populous Roman Catholic country, allows abortions only in cases of rape or risk to a mother's life or if a fetus is brainless.

Despite those limits, government statistics suggest that around 1 million abortions are performed each year in Brazil, many under unhygienic conditions. Botched abortions are the fifth leading cause of death for Brazilian [women](#), representing some 200,000 deaths per year.

"The reality of the facts shows that women are getting abortions with great inequality" of circumstances, said the group's president, Roberto Luis d'Avila. "Rich women are getting them in safe conditions and the poor, completely unsafe ... with complications, losing their uteruses, losing parts of their intestines, dying. It's not possible. This inequality is unacceptable from the medical point of view."

"We defend the right for women to decide," d'Avila said.

He said 80 percent of the group's 27 regional branches voted to support decriminalizing abortions through the first trimester. The council will send its recommendations to the Senate by next week to be examined by a committee that's looking into possible changes to Brazil's penal code.

The conservative National Conference of Brazilian Bishops immediately criticized the recommendation.

The newspaper Folha de S. Paulo quoted the conference's Bishop Joao Carlos Petrini as saying the decriminalization of first trimester abortions would "strengthen a mentality that favors the use of violence and death."

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