

# Deadly Silence – Unsafe Abortion in Africa

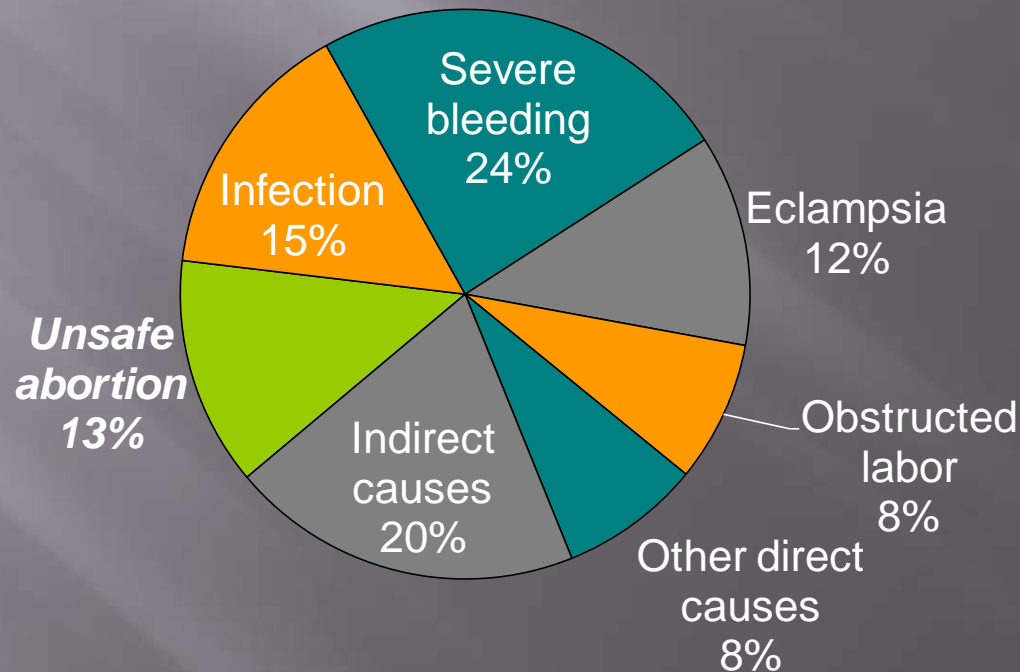
By

# Maternal mortality and morbidity: A critical global problem

- ▣ 2010 estimates --287,000 maternal deaths-- down from 543,000 in 1990.
- ▣ Translates to nearly 800 women dying of pregnancy related conditions every day
- ▣ Sub- Saharan Africa and South Asia contribute to 86% of these deaths
- ▣ Vast majority are due to preventable causes including unsafe abortion that need minimal cost to address

# Unsafe abortion-Significant contributor to maternal mortality

## Causes of maternal death worldwide



# Abortion: As old as humankind



Oldest known visual representation of abortion, at the Angkor Wat site in Cambodia, dated around 1150, depicting an abortion.



This poster from the Soviet Union around 1925 warned: about unsafe abortions: "Abortions performed by either trained or self-taught midwives not only maim the woman, they also often lead to death."



# What is Unsafe Abortion?

- ▣ Unsafe abortion is a procedure for terminating an unplanned, unwanted pregnancy performed by individuals without the necessary skills, or in an environment that does not conform to the minimum medical standards, or both
- ▣ When performed within an enabling legal framework – by trained health professionals abortion is one of the safest medical procedures

WHO

# Public Health and Human Rights crisis of unsafe abortion in Africa

- ▣ **Over 40 million** abortions worldwide in 2008
- ▣ **22 million** unsafe abortions globally
- ▣ **6.2 million** in Africa
- ▣ **Nearly 60%** are by women under 25
- ▣ **47,000** deaths globally from unsafe abortion
- ▣ **5 million** disabilities
- ▣ **29,000** deaths in Sub-Saharan Africa alone-
- ▣ Africa's share of global unsafe abortions is 29% and, more seriously, 62% of all deaths related to unsafe abortion occur in Africa

# Why do women seek abortions?

A woman may not want to be pregnant because of:

- Personal reasons
- Health reasons
- Socioeconomic reasons
- Cultural reasons
- Relationships
- The desire to stop childbearing/space births
- Rape or incest

Source: World Health Organization, *Safe abortion: Technical and policy guidance for health systems* (2003)

A woman may *want* to have a child but:

- The pregnancy may not be supported by woman's partner, family, or community
- The pregnancy may threaten the woman's health or survival
- The fetus may have an abnormality

# Where safe abortion is unavailable, women seek unsafe abortions.



Alligator pepper, chalk and alum



Bleach



Cassava plant



Bahaman grass



Quinine and other noxious substances



# Major causes of unsafe abortion in Africa

- ▣ Low access to much needed FP ---CPR < 20  
→High rates of unintended pregnancy → unsafe abortions →deaths and disabilities
- ▣ Poverty and the high cost of safe abortion
- ▣ Lack of access to legal safe abortion services
- ▣ Gender inequalities-women have no say
- ▣ Stigma and silence around abortion
- ▣ Cultural and religious factors- personal beliefs
- ▣ Reluctance to do away with inherited antiquated laws dating back to 1861 (1801)

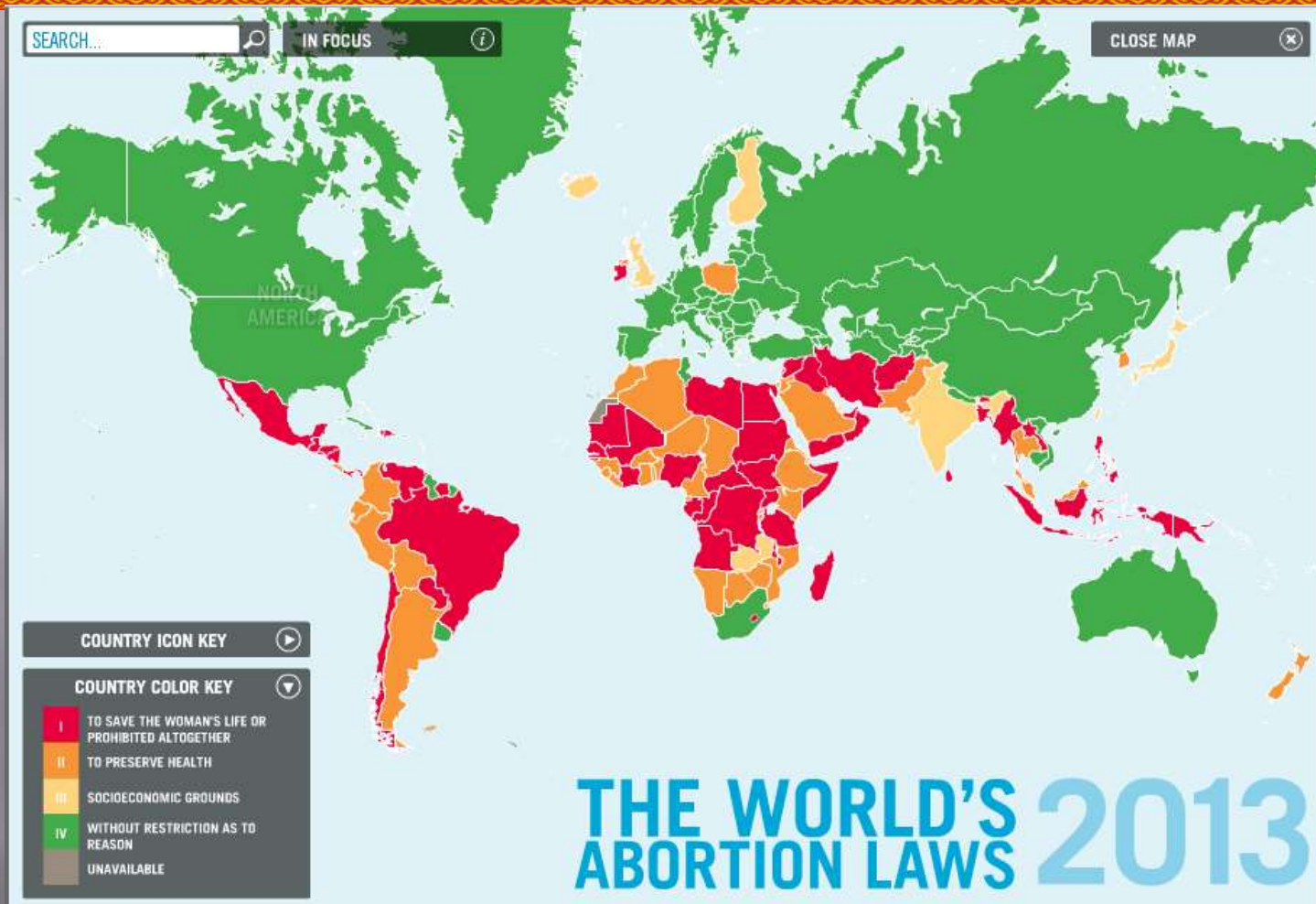
# Cost of post-abortion care (2006)

## Economic and Development issue

Region	Average PAC Cost Per Patient	Average PAC Health System Costs	Costs for PAC Cases Treated
Africa	US \$213	US \$171 million	US \$168 million for 1,730,000 cases
Sub-Saharan Africa	US \$228	US \$120 million	US \$ 117 million for 1,180,000 cases
Latin America	US \$161	US \$108 million	-

(Vlassoff et al. 2008, 2009)

# Global Abortion Laws



# Restrictive laws do not stop abortions

"evidence shows that women who seek an abortion will do so regardless of legal restrictions..."

Where there are few restrictions on the availability of safe abortion, deaths and illness are dramatically reduced."

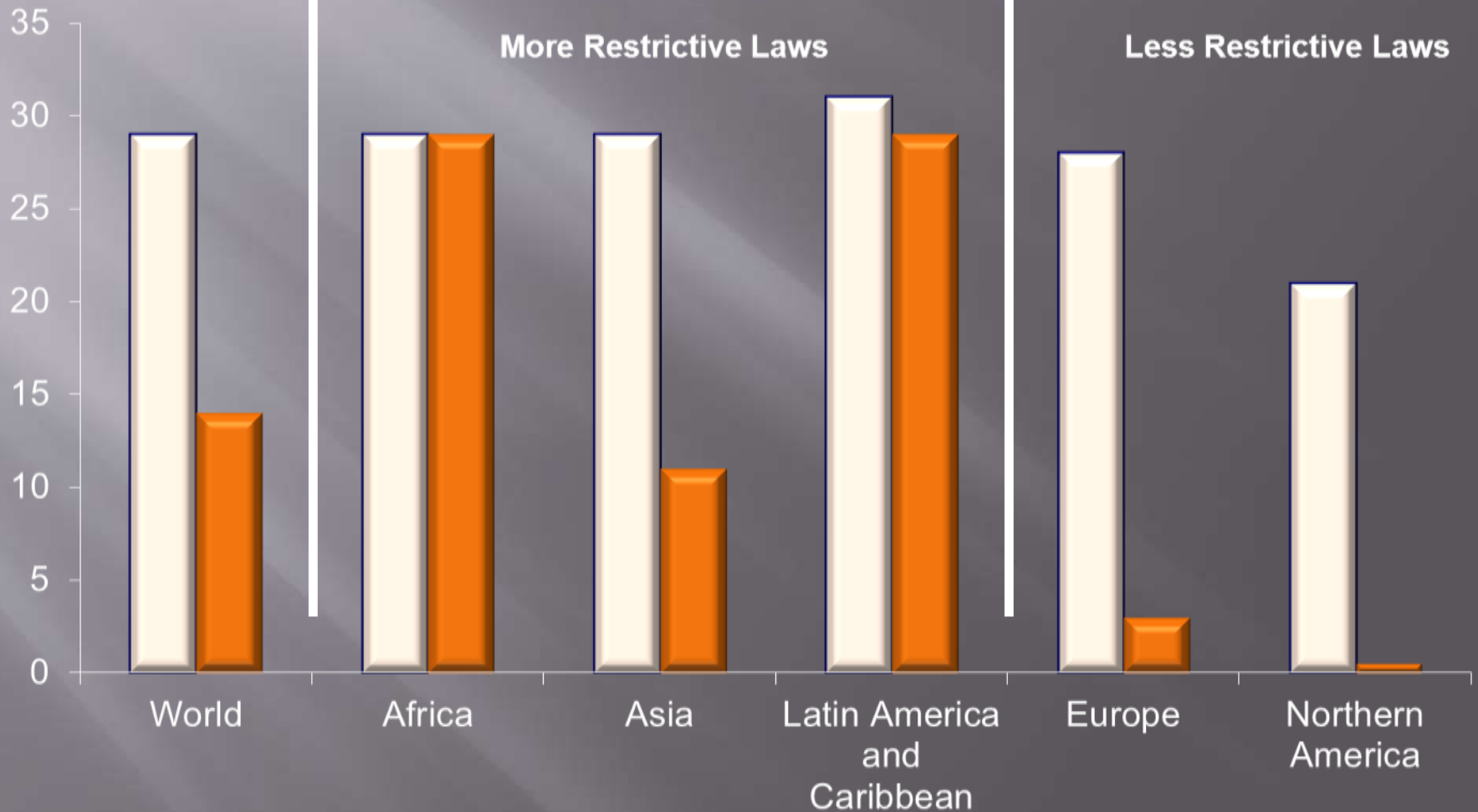
(WHO- Women and Health: Today's Evidence Tomorrow's Agenda, 2009)





# Abortion rates are similar, safety varies dramatically

(abortions per 1,000 women ages 15 – 44)



Source: Sedgh et al., 2007

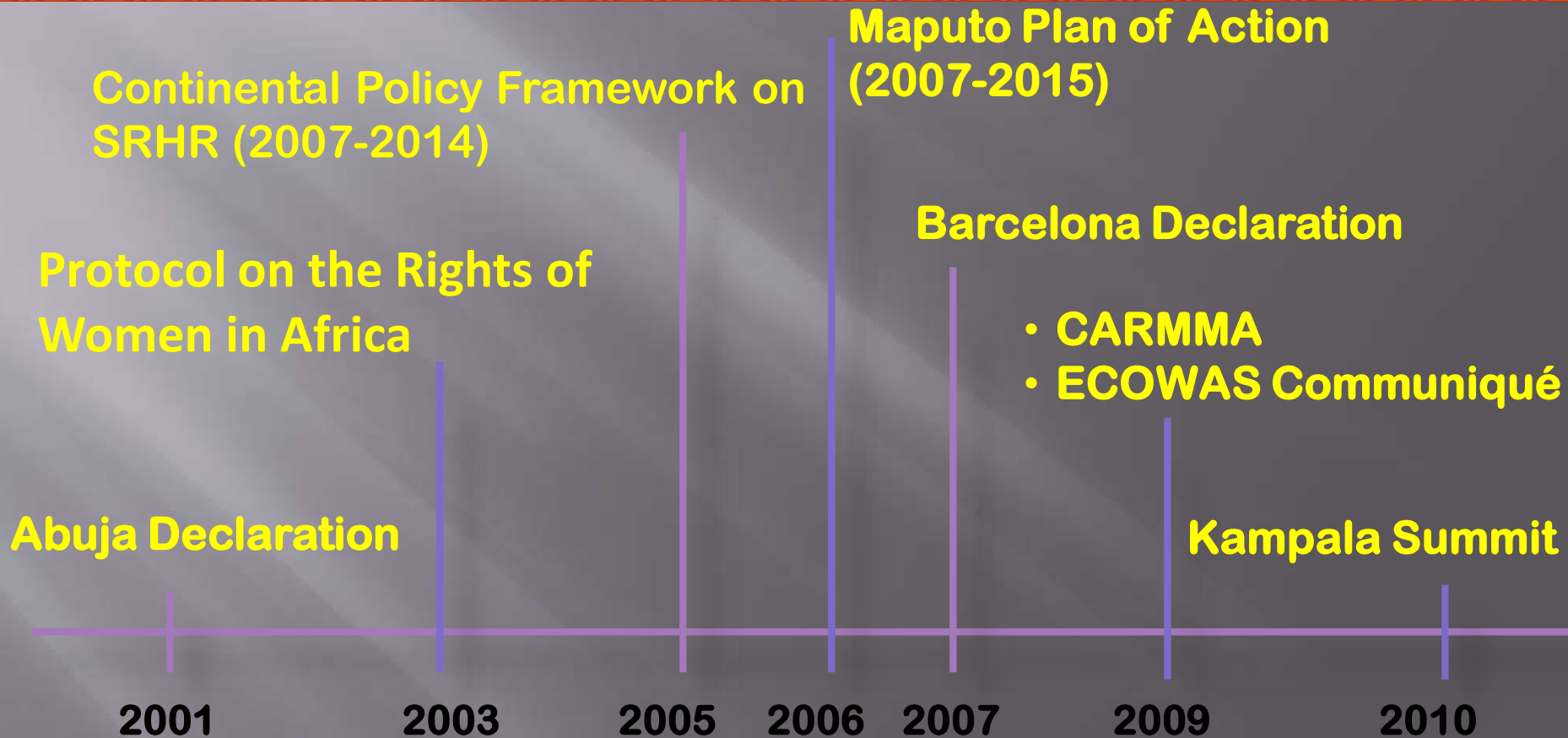
■ Total Abortion rate

■ Unsafe Abortion rate

# International Response: access to safe abortion is a human right



# African Regional Policy Framework



# Abortion Laws in Africa



## COUNTRY COLOR KEY



I	TO SAVE THE WOMAN'S LIFE OR PROHIBITED ALTOGETHER
II	TO PRESERVE HEALTH
III	SOCIOECONOMIC GROUNDS
IV	WITHOUT RESTRICTION AS TO REASON
	UNAVAILABLE



# Abortion Laws in Africa (Cont.)

- ▣ **No country has absolute ban on abortion!** All African countries have at least one indication and many have several for which abortion is legal
- ▣ Life: All countries (defence of necessity)
- ▣ Health: 28 countries including mental health
- ▣ Foetal impairment: 14 countries
- ▣ Social indications: 1 country
- ▣ On request: 3 countries

# Protocol to the African Charter on the Rights of Women in Africa (2003)

“Protect the reproductive rights of women by authorizing medical abortion in cases of sexual assault, rape, incest, and where the continued pregnancy endangers the mental and physical health of the mother or the life of the mother or the fetus.”

Article 14, para 2C

# Status of Ratification of the Protocol

**Countries that  
have Ratified =  
36**

- Angola
- Benin
- Burkina Faso
- Cameroon
- Cape Verde
- Comoros
- Congo
- Cote d' Ivoire
- Democratic Republic of Congo
- Djibouti
- Equatorial Guinea
- Gabon
- Gambia
- Ghana
- Guinea
- Guinea-Bissau
- Kenya\*\*\*\*
- Lesotho
- Liberia
- Libya
- Mali
- Malawi
- Mauritania
- Mozambique
- Namibia
- Nigeria
- Rwanda\*\*\*\* -
- Senegal
- Seychelles
- South Africa
- Swaziland
- Tanzania
- Togo
- Uganda\*\*\*\*\*
- Zambia
- Zimbabwe

**Countries that  
have signed  
but not  
ratified = 15**

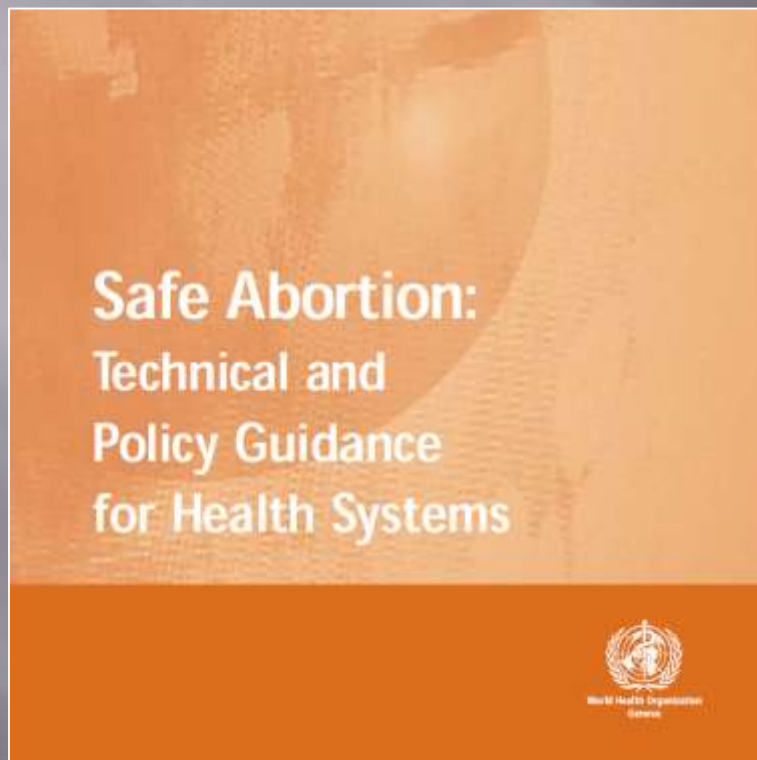
- Algeria
- Burundi
- Central African Republic
- Chad
- Eritrea
- Ethiopia
- Madagascar
- Mauritius
- Niger
- Sahrawi Arab Democratic
- Sao Tome and Principe
- Sierra Leone
- Somalia
- Sudan
- South Sudan

**Countries that  
have neither  
signed nor  
ratified = 3**

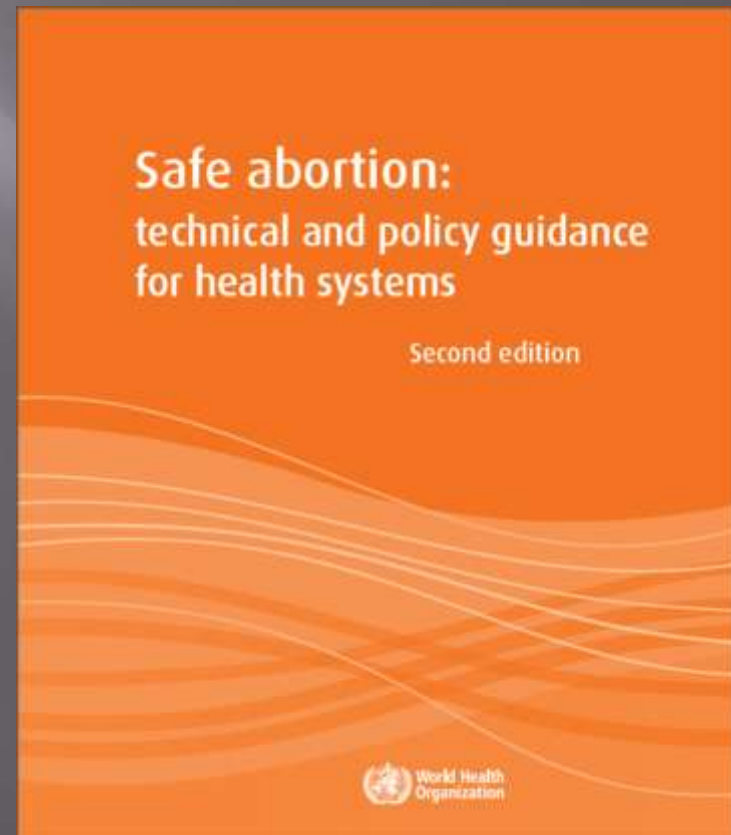
- Botswana
- Egypt
- Tunisia

# How-to: By the World Health Organization

2003 Edition



2012 Edition





# Progress in Africa since ICPD

- ▣ **South Africa--1997** CTOP -followed by S&Gs and training for services delivery. Abortion related MM ↓ 90% (2007)
- ▣ **Ethiopia 2005** -expanded its abortion law. Implementing safe abortion services. Incidence of unsafe abortion↓
- ▣ **Ghana, Zambia-** Ministry of Health with support from NGOs launched S&Gs to implement their very liberal abortion laws
- ▣ **Francophone** countries-- Several increased legal indications for elective abortion since ICPD; some have S&Gs

# Constitutional threats – When does human life begin?

- ▣ Clause “- life begins at conception –” used by anti-choice and fundamentalists to deny women’s rights
- ▣ In Kenyan Constitution, now in Zambia draft. Attempt in Ghana failed
- ▣ Tanzania- Need to resist introduction of clause
- ▣ Only 15 countries (mostly Catholic) out of 200 worldwide recognize right to life before birth.
- ▣ Only 4 constitutions mention abortion - not constitutional issue
- ▣ Empirical- No scientific, religious or other basis.
- ▣ UDHR- Human rights from BIRTH. Also CEDAW etc

# How do we confront this challenge?

- ▣ Unsafe Abortion - ALL knowledge and technologies known - we are sitting on the fence and watching women die.
- ▣ Recognize the **gender** dimensions of unsafe abortion and accept that unsafe abortions should NOT happen.
- ▣ Improve access to Family Planning/ contraception and sexuality education
- ▣ Need to review outmoded restrictive colonial laws according to international and regional human rights standards- Maputo Protocol – minimum standard
- ▣ **Urgently provide safe services for ALL legal indications**

# What can FIDA do?

- ▣ Lawyers -Understand laws, draft barrier free laws and interpret laws broadly. Also to support S&G development
- ▣ Continue to seek to understand the issue/ know all dimensions of the arguments and evidence base
- ▣ Take a leadership role in advocacy
- ▣ Ask questions of Govt or take initiative yourselves  
Do Shadow Reports – CEDAW, CRC, ACHPR etc
- ▣ Active role in advocacy, drafting progressive laws, development of barrier free Standards and Guidelines
- ▣ Watchdogs for IMPLEMENTATION and ACCESS



# African women are counting on us!





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▣ Thanks for your attention!