

Spanish govt approves new restrictive abortion law (Update)

December 20 2013, by Ciaran Giles

Spain's conservative government on Friday approved tighter restrictions on abortion, allowing the practice only in the case of rape or when there is a serious health risk to the mother or fetus.

The previous government had made abortion widely legal before the 14th week only three years ago. But the ruling Popular Party has long sided with the Roman Catholic Church on moral and social issues and made changing the law one of its main campaign promises in the 2011 vote that brought the party to power.

Justice Minister Alberto Ruiz-Gallardon said the change was necessary to provide greater protection for both women and the unborn.

"What the government understands is that in the dramatic circumstances of an abortion, the woman is not guilty. The woman is always the victim," he said.

The bill has been vigorously opposed by most opposition parties and women's groups, who see it as an attack on women's rights and a step backward compared to Spain's neighbors in Europe. The legislation must still be approved by parliament, but the Popular Party's large majority means it is almost certain to pass.

Women seeking abortions will need approval from two doctors who are not performing the procedure and doctors can decline to perform an abortion for reasons of conscience, Gallardon said. The likelihood of a

child being born with disabilities will not be an acceptable justification for abortion.

Gallardon said 16- and 17-year-olds will once again have to obtain permission from their parents—and be accompanied by them—to have an abortion.

Francisca Garcia of the Association of Accredited Abortion Clinics, which represents the vast majority of Spain's abortion clinics, said about 100,000 of the 118,000 abortions carried out last year in Spain would be illegal under the new law.

"This is a historic day for Spain. It is not the end of abortion, but it is an important step to achieving that objective," said Gador Joya, a spokeswoman for the Right to Life organization.

Women's groups across the country have called on women lawmakers, regardless of their party membership, to reject the legislation.

"This takes away our rights," said pro-abortion protester Mariqueta Vazquez. "The fundamental right of any woman, or man, is to decide about their own body."

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