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The campaign to legalize abortion in Venezuela gained greater publicity this week, with advocacy groups showing optimism after a law to legalize abortion was passed in Uruguay last month.

In Venezuela the law currently states that voluntary abortion of pregnancy is punishable for up to two years in prison.

Although the law is rarely applied, the illegality of abortion means many women seeking the procedure resort to clandestine means, with one study by the Central University of Venezuela estimating that 16% of maternal deaths in Venezuela are a result of complications from clandestine abortions.

The Venezuelan coalition of left-wing feminist groups, the Feminist Spider, has submitted a reform for discussion in the Venezuelan National Assembly which would modify the country's penal law to legalise abortion up to the 12th week of pregnancy.

In an interview yesterday on the program "Up Front" on Venezuelan state channel VTV, campaigner Tatiana Rojas argued that Venezuela was ready to have a public discussion about the legal right to abortion.

Referring to the quantity of calls her organisation “Skirts in Revolution” receives to their information line, which gives advice on safe abortion methods, Rojas said, “Abortion isn’t a hypothetical situation, it’s a reality, it’s being done by women every day…our sisters, our neighbours; it’s a reality that we have to deal with.”

Rojas, whose group was formed in 2011, and whose acronym in Spanish stands for “Feminists in Free and Direct Action for Safe Abortion", also argued that clandestine abortion is a class issue, as the options available to women opting for abortion differ depending on socio-economic background.

“Penalisation of abortion doesn’t affect rich women and those of lower classes equally, because [wealthy women] can access a foreign treatment or pay a private clinic…whereby poor women are exposed to a clandestine market, irregular clinics, [or] they perform it upon themselves,” she said.

The Skirts in Revolution representative also stated that despite abortion being in many regards a taboo issue in Venezuela, with religious views maintaining a strong influence on the matter, campaigners were “optimistic” about progress toward legalisation.

“We are called Skirts in Revolution because we don’t think abortion would be legalised in any other context. We want this to happen in the [Bolivarian] revolution,” she said. She further made reference to the example of Venezuela’s ally Cuba, where abortion is legal.

The interview, which was also covered in the government’s newspaper Correo del Orinoco, was conducted in the context of the legalization of abortion up to the 12th week of pregnancy in Uruguay last month, the second country in South America to make such a move.

According to a recent study published in the medical journal Lancet, Latin America has one of the highest rates of abortion in the world, at 32 per 1000 women. Meanwhile Western Europe, where abortion is legal, has the lowest, at 12 per 1000 women.