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FOR
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SEXUALITY

YOUACT
EUROPEAN YOUTH NETWORK ON
SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Keizersgracht 177,
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The Netherlands

Thursday 22nd September 2016

H.E. Beata Maria Szydło
Prime Minister of the Republic of Poland
Willa Parkowa Rezydencja Premiera RP
Ul. Parkowa,
Warsaw
Republic of Poland

Your Excellency

We, the undersigned civil society organizations, wish to appeal to you on behalf of the women of Poland, to uphold their right to safe and legal abortion. We are calling on you, within your capacity as Prime Minister of Poland to urgently dismiss the "Stop Abortion" bill and ensure the rights of Polish women are upheld.

Within this joint civil society statement and Call to Action, endorsed by fifty-one organisations; you will find well-researched and documented factual information about a woman's right to abortion, which confirms and reinforces the urgency behind it. Empirical evidence demonstrates that when access to abortion is restricted in a country, abortion rates tend to remain the same or increase. Restricting access only forces girls and women to resort to private, illegal or unsafe abortion services, which pose a serious risk to their health and lives.

The law on abortion in Poland has been one of the most restrictive in Europe for the past twenty-five years. Such a harmful legal tradition will be continued if the "Stop Abortion" bill comes into action. If put into force, the new law will ban and criminalize abortion in all cases, and introduce severe punishments for women and any individual involved in abortion procedures.

The "Save the Women" initiative proposes to bring about a change in the law that will ensure Polish women's essential access to sexual and reproductive health services, such as comprehensive sexuality education and access to modern methods of contraception.

We urge you, Your Excellency, and the Polish government, to act quickly in order to put an immediate end to the "Stop Abortion" bill, and reaffirm the reproductive human rights of all women in Your country.

Sincerely,

Ana Rizescu
Cristina Moreno
Gosia Kot
Jelena Lucija Brodnjak
Lewis Emmerton
Marta Szostak
Monty Aal

JOINT STATEMENT AND CALL TO ACTION FOR THE POLISH PARLIAMENT TO EXAMINE THE RIGHT TO ACCESS TO SAFE AND LEGAL ABORTION

We, the undersigned civil society organisations, are deeply concerned with the current developments in Poland regarding women's health and their access to safe and legal abortion.

Two draft bills, resulting from citizens initiatives, will be subject to discussion at the Polish Parliament on **Thursday September 22nd 2016**. Both bills address women's bodily autonomy and reproductive rights and services in Poland.

The "*Save the Women*" initiative proposes to change the law on abortion in Poland, which has been one of the most restrictive in Europe for the past 25 years, by introducing not only access to safe and legal abortion until the 12th week of pregnancy but also a complete package of sexual and reproductive health services, such as comprehensive sexuality education and access to modern methods of contraception.

The "*Stop Abortion*" bill proposes to ban abortion in all cases, and introduces severe punishments for women and medical professionals who undergo and assist with abortion procedures. Prepared by groups which seek to prevent women from enjoying their basic right to health, this bill would have severe consequences if put into force.

Every year, almost 50,000 women worldwide die as a result of abortions performed in illegal and unsafe conditions. Restricting access to legal and safe abortion will force girls and women to resort to private, illegal or unsafe abortion services, which pose a serious risk to their health and lives.

Such a law would also disrespect many international treaties and agreements, of which the Polish Government is a signatory and State Party. The importance of the realization of women's reproductive rights has been emphasized in the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; European Convention on Human Rights; General Recommendation No. 14 of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; and Resolution 1607 on Access to safe and legal abortion in Europe of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

We express deep concern that fundamental health rights would be compromised by the "Stop Abortion" bill. Empirical evidence demonstrates that when access to abortion is restricted in a

country, abortion rates tend to remain the same or increase. In fact, abortions continue to be performed illegally or outside the country, leading to abortion “tourism”. Reproductive health services, such as abortion or prenatal testing, will only become available to those who can afford private healthcare in illegal settings.

We **STRESS** that the failure of the Polish state to ensure access to safe and legal abortions, will have detrimental consequences to the lives and health of women in Poland.

We **POINT TO** the fact that criminalisation of abortion leads to higher rates of unsafe abortion, and increased maternal morbidity and mortality. There are 37 abortions per 1,000 women in countries where abortion is severely restricted or prohibited compared to 34 abortion per 1,000 in countries where abortion services are readily available¹.

We **EMPHASIZE** that the Polish government’s failure to provide access to safe and legal abortion amounts to violations of human rights, as stated in the Resolution 1607 of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe² and has been subject to numerous cases at the European Court of Human Rights.

We **URGE** the Polish government to put an immediate end to the “Stop Abortion” bill.

We **DEMAND** that the Polish government complies with its human rights obligations towards the women of Poland and takes immediate steps towards the realization of:

1. Women’s reproductive rights by ensuring the fulfilment of access to safe and legal abortion services nation-wide for all women in Poland without stigmatization, discrimination, intimidation or victimisation of women requiring these services;
2. Relevant monitoring of number and conditions of illegal abortions;
3. Ensuring access to sexuality education and broad access to modern contraceptives in order to prevent unwanted pregnancies.

We, the undersigned civil society organizations, support the “Save the Women”³ initiative by endorsing this statement and the cause behind it.

¹ Induced Abortion Worldwide, Guttmacher Institute, May 2016

² PACE Statement, Access to safe and legal abortion in Europe, Resolution 1607 (2008)

³ www.ratujmykobiety.pl

Endorsed by:

Abortion Rights Campaign
Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada
Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights
Advocacy, Research, Training and Services
(ARTS) Foundation
Alianza Por la Solidaridad
Asia Pacific Alliance for Sexual and
Reproductive Health and Rights
Association Pariter
Baku Volunteer Center
Casakliniek Goes, Center for Abortion,
Sexuality Questions and Contraception
Catholics for Choice
Center for Reproductive Rights
Center for Women Policy Studies
Center Women and Modern World
CESI
Danish Family Planning Association
El Hueco Films
Family Planning Association of Moldova /
Societatea de Planificare a Familiei din
Moldova (SPFM)
Federación Planificación Familiar Estatal
FRIDA The Young Feminist Fund
Gender Alternatives Foundation
Gender and Development
Global Doctors for Choice
HERA – Health Education and Research
Association
IFMSA – International Federation of Medical
Students Associations
International Campaign for Women’s Right
to Safe Abortion
Latvia’s Association for Family Planning and
Sexual Health (Papardes Zieds)
Le Planning Familial
Reproductive Health Access Project
Reproductive Health Matters
Reproductive Health Training Center
Reproductive Health Training Center from
Moldova
SALUS Charitable Foundation
Sana Sezim NGO
Sarajevo Open Centre (Sarajevski Otvereni
Centar)
Sensoa, Expertise Centre for Sexual Health
Society for Education in Contraception and
Sexuality (SECS)
Society for Education on Contraception and
Sexuality
Society for Feminist Analyses (AnA)
Society Without Violence
Union Women Center (ECOSOC)
Union Women Center (Georgia)
Women on Waves
Women on Waves International Foundation
Women on Web
Women’s Global Network for Reproductive
Rights
Women’s Rights Center
Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive
Rights
Youth Initiative – World Association for
Sexual Health
Y-PEER
YSAFE (Youth Sexual Awareness for Europe)