

November 9, 2020

President Andrzej Duda and Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki
Chancellery of the Prime Minister
Aleje Ujazdowskie 1/3
Warszawa
22 694 60 00

Dear President Duda and Minister Morawiecki,

We write on behalf of Global Doctors for Choice, a broad network of physicians from more than 30 countries working together to advance access to sexual and reproductive healthcare. As doctors, we are obligated to put our patient's health interests before all else. Poland's proposed restrictions on safe abortion would imperil the health of our patients.

Before COVID-19 limited travel, an estimated 80,000 – 120,000 Polish women sought abortions abroad each year. Last year there were just over 1,000 legal abortions in Poland, a tiny fraction of the total number sought. Women seeking abortions due to fetal abnormalities have been virtually the only ones with a chance of obtaining one legally, making up 98% of all approved abortion cases.

Despite the fact that the law in Poland allows abortions only in the cases of fetal defects, risk to the woman's health and incest or rape, numerous women who qualify under this very law have suffered various degrees of harm after being denied their right. A pregnant woman with ulcerative colitis was refused the diagnostic care she needed for her to make an informed decision about her health care. When it was determined that continuing her pregnancy would pose a serious risk to her life, she was still denied an abortion and subsequently died. Again, a 14-year-old girl who was raped immediately reported her rape to the police. She was denied emergency contraception at the hospital and when it became clear that this child had been impregnated by her rapist, she was denied an abortion. In another case, a 36-year-old woman was repeatedly warned by doctors that she could lose her vision if she continued her pregnancy yet she was denied an abortion. As a result, this young woman lost her ability to see and is on permanent disability. The European Court of Human Rights subsequently found Poland in violation of its positive obligations to ensure this woman's right to private life.

The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division has emphasized the rights of all couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children, and the right to information and access to safe, effective, affordable and acceptable methods of family planning of their choice. The World Health Organization has also stated that restrictive abortion laws are not associated with lower abortion rates, but rather lead to more clandestine and unsafe abortions. The international medical community has made it clear that abortion services are a part of basic healthcare, and that restricting abortion is detrimental to the health and rights of the very women the law is supposed to protect. We are calling on Poland to comply with international medical standards laid out by the United Nations and the World Health Organization, and to safeguard their citizens' access to essential health services including abortion.



On behalf of the Board of Managers of Global Doctors for Choice,

Wendy Chavkin, MD, MPH, New York, USA

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