

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 **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 contraception in order to prevent unwanted pregnancies.

We, the undersigned civil society organizations, **invite you to 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