

7 September 2005

Mr. Marek Belka  
The Prime Minister of Poland

Dear Mr. Prime Minister,

We are writing to you in connection with High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly of the United Nations and especially the World Summit which is taking place in September 14-16 in New York. The World Summit will review five years of implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – the global UN agenda adopted by 191 world countries in 2000 – aimed at eradicating extreme poverty and hunger; achieving universal primary education; promoting gender equality and empower women; reducing child mortality; improving maternal health; combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; ensuring environmental sustainability; developing a global partnership for development.

We would like to draw your attention to the importance of sexual and reproductive health and rights which constitute fundamental human rights, full implementation of which are necessary for successful implementation of MDGs. As Kofi Annan reminded us at the opening of the session of the 49<sup>th</sup> Commission on the Status of Women marking Beijing + 10, guaranteeing sexual and reproductive health and rights is one of seven strategic priorities for the achievement of MDGs. He stated then: “How can we achieve real equality when half a million women die of pregnancy-related causes every year causes that are entirely preventable?”

On behalf of the Polish Federation for Women and Family Planning and ASTRA – Central and Eastern European Women’s Network for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights of which we are founding members we would like to urge you to take a strong position on sexual and reproductive health and rights during the World Summit. ASTRA consisting of 24 member organizations from the region has been established in 1999 to monitor and advocate for full implementation of sexual and reproductive health and rights in Central and Eastern Europe in accordance with the commitments made by governments during the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994 and during the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. ASTRA long experience shows that sexual and reproductive rights in Central and Eastern are far from being achieved which constitutes serious barrier in achieving development goals.

The main problems include: lack of sexual education, very limited access to modern contraceptives, legal and/or policy restrictions in access to abortion as well as growing pandemic of sexually transmitted infections incl. HIV/AIDS. Lack of satisfactory policies in this area makes young people and women particularly vulnerable, seriously impedes gender equality, women’s empowerment and other development goals. In Poland for example restrictive anti-abortion law led to many dramas of women. Limited access to information and services regarding sexual and reproductive health is a cause of high teenage pregnancy and dramatically growing incidence of HIV/AIDS infections especially among the youth.

We urge you to take all these issues into consideration and address them during the World Summit. We also urge you to strengthen the implementation of MDGs at the national level especially in the area of sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Sincerely,

Wanda Nowicka

On behalf of Federation for Women and Family Planning/ ASTRA Secretariat