

Warsaw, 20-10-2006

**Dear High Level Committee on Health's Member,**

I am writing to you regarding the forthcoming meeting of the High Level Committee on Health. ASTRA Network truly appreciates the important role the Committee is playing in developing European Health Policy. We are really looking forward for the outcomes of the Committee's next meeting that is about to take place on 25th October.

ASTRA Network is working in the field of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR). Our efforts aim to guarantee that the issues of SRHR are adequately recognized as an important factors affecting the quality of life and that those issues are treated with adequate priority on international, regional and national health agendas. ASTRA is constantly monitoring the situation in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), as concerns reproductive and sexual health. We would like to present to the High Level Committee the realistic picture of the situation in the region and draw your attention to the most burning problems that require a European response.

The reproductive health situations in new Member States and accession countries to the European Union, as well as neighboring countries are similar. For instance, in many countries of the CEE region, due to limited contraceptives services and information, abortion is used as primary method of fertility control. Still many women are denied access to modern contraceptive methods because of financial inaccessibility, lack of information or because they receive misleading information. In addition, attempts to curb women's access to safe and legal abortion are leaving many women in vulnerable situations which threaten their life and health. Accurate and scientifically – based sexuality education and access to reproductive health services is also limited due to the growing influence of conservative forces, including the Catholic Church. Moreover, sexually transmitted infections – including HIV/AIDS – rates have dramatically risen, especially amongst adolescents and women in some countries and experts predict that this crisis will likely spread to other CEE countries if there are no strong rights – based prevention programmes in place.

I am deeply concerned of the poor reproductive health situation in the CEE region. I believe that this just brief overview of the most burning problems presented above, gives an idea on how dealing with SRHR issues is important in this specific European region.

I would like to draw your attention to the recent ASTRA reports: "Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in Europe. Report to the European Union." and "Youth Voice - Report on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in the Central and Eastern Europe and Balkan Countries."

They are available at ASTRA website: [www.astra.org.pl](http://www.astra.org.pl) ([www.astra.org.pl/srhrEU.pdf](http://www.astra.org.pl/srhrEU.pdf), [www.astra.org.pl/youth\\_report.pdf](http://www.astra.org.pl/youth_report.pdf)).

The reports will also be sent in hard copy to HLCPH members.

I truly believe these issues will also be addressed during the forthcoming meeting.

On behalf of ASTRA Network

Your Sincerely,

Wanda Nowicka  
President of the Polish Federation for Women and Family Planning  
Acting as ASTRA Secretariat