

25th February 2008

Members of Lithuanian Parliament

Gedimino ave. 53

LT-01109 Vilnius

Lithuania

Dear Sir or Madam,

On behalf of Polish Federation for Women and Family Planning I am writing to you in connection with the draft law pending in Sejmas to severely restrict access to legal abortion in Lithuania due to be discussed in early spring this year.

I would like to share with you our fifteen years long experience concerning strict anti – abortion law, which was introduced in Poland in 1993 and to draw your attention to real results of restrictive legislation. I believe that Polish experience will allow you to assess beforehand what social effects such restrictions will inevitably lead to.

The regular reports of the Federation monitoring the results of the law indicate that anti-abortion law has not liquidated nor even limited the phenomenon of abortion. Pregnancies are still terminated, but instead of being performed in safe environment of a hospital they are pushed into the so-called abortion underground, where there are no guarantees of protection of women's life and health. According to the official statistics, the number of legal abortions remains on a similar level – approximately 200 abortions annually (124 in 2001, 340 in 2006 – The governmental reports from 2001 and 2006), which by no means is a reflection of the real number of abortions. On the basis of comparative demographic data and relevant research, the number of abortions in Poland is annually estimated between 80,000 and 190,000.

On the other hand, the right of women to legal termination of pregnancy is notoriously violated. Most doctors refuse to perform abortion in public hospitals but in private clinics they charge at least 500 Euro. More and more “clients” of abortion underground are women who have the right to legal abortion, but who were not able, for various reasons, to execute this right. There is a well-known case of a Polish woman Alicja Tysi c, who was denied legal abortion and won the case in the European Court of Human Rights in March 2007. She presently suffers serious health complications due to that refusal. Others, travel abroad in order to terminate their pregnancies. This phenomenon, called abortion tourism, has grown recently due to European Enlargement which increased significantly women's mobility.

For many years of Federation's experience it has become obvious that the anti-abortion act has not decreased number of abortions in Poland but led to many human dramas, including losses of health and even sometimes life of women in Poland.

On behalf of the Polish Federation for Women and Family Planning I urge members of Lithuanian Parliament to take all these issues into consideration while making your decision. We hope that final decision of the Lithuanian Parliament will not worsen the situation of Lithuanian women with regard to their rights and health.

**Yours sincerely,
Wanda Nowicka
President**

CC.
President of the Republic of Lithuania
Prime minister of the Republic of Lithuania
Speaker of the Seimas
All political parties
Daily Newspaper „Lietuvos rytas”
LTV
Panorama
Rimgaudas Geležiūsis, Radio Director
BTV
TV 3
Human Rights Monitoring Institute
Lithuanian Centre for Human Rights