Call to uphold the health rights of girls and women, and citizens to access accurate information and comprehensive sexual education in Poland

Dear Deputy Permanent Representatives,

As Members of Parliaments from across political parties, we wish to express our deep concern about the two draft bills which are going to be voted in the Polish Sejm on 15 and 16 April 2020 and concern both sexuality education and access to abortion. We call on the Polish parliament to reject these draft bills.

We are appalled that Polish authorities are using the COVID-19 pandemic and general lockdown to achieve its objective to limit women’s reproductive health and therefore their human dignity. Thousands of Polish women already clearly expressed their strong opposition to previous proposals to further restrict the country’s abortion law during the so-called Black Protests of 2016. Therefore, the current actions of the Polish government can only be considered as a cowardly move designed to evade democratic scrutiny as currently there are very limited options for Polish society to voice their opposition to such harsh initiatives.

The draft bill on abortion risks causing serious damage to women’s health and lives and violating Poland’s international human rights obligations. It would ban abortion in situations where there is a severe foetal anomaly, one of only three legal grounds for termination of pregnancy available in a country that already has one of Europe’s most restrictive abortion laws. The health and human rights implications for women living in countries with such restrictive laws are severe.

Many women who decide to end a pregnancy either travel to another country to obtain safe and legal abortion services or undergo illegal clandestine abortion at home and often risk their lives during these unsafe procedures. Some women may be left with no choice but to carry a pregnancy to term against their will. Even in those limited circumstances where abortion is legal in Poland, women still face barriers. In particular, in several regions in Poland women are often unable to obtain an abortion.

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1 Parliamentary Document no 39 on amending the act of June 6, 1997 - the Penal Code, and Parliamentary Document No 36 on the amendment to the Act of 7 January 1993 on family planning, protection of the human foetus and conditions for the termination of pregnancy.
due to refusals of care by doctors. This law would damage women’s equality, dignity, autonomy, and bodily integrity, restricting their access to information and their rights to a private life and to health, and exposing them to forms of cruel and inhuman treatment.

We urge the Polish Parliament to respect the right of women to make autonomous decisions about their own bodies and reproductive functions, which are at the very core of their fundamental right to equality and privacy concerning intimate matters of physical and psychological integrity. We also condemn the shift in Poland towards misinforming young people, and stigmatising and banning sexuality education. We call on the Polish Authorities to refrain from adopting the bill, which follows recent attempts to limit sexual and reproductive rights in Poland, including the right to abortion.

Yours sincerely,

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6. Hon. Katharina Kucharowits, MP, Austria
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