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Item 6 Consideration of the Universal Periodic Review Reports – POLAND

Statement by Action Canada for Population and Development

Thank you Madam President.

We appreciate member state concerns about women's reproductive health services and reproductive rights in Poland. We welcome recommendations made in that matter and encourage the Polish government to implement as a minimum the existing provisions guaranteed under Polish law. Proper implementation of the provisions of the Act on family planning consist at least of three elements.

Firstly there are guarantees to realize a woman's right to decide about abortion when allowed by law. This means that abortion services should be available to all women who meet the legal criteria. Studies and research conducted by NGOs as well as cases decided on by the European Court of Human Rights show that access to legal abortion services is very limited. We urge the Polish government to take all possible actions to improve access to legal abortion services.

Secondly, the provisions of the Act on family planning are to guarantee access to modern contraceptives which is extremely limited in Poland. There is no refund from the state budget (except for one hormonal medication of a so called "old" generation) and a woman is required to have a prescription for most methods of contraception. At the same time doctors tend to refuse to issue such prescription. There are additional problems with purchasing contraceptives (especially emergency contraception which is falsely perceived as abortifacients) as pharmacists tend to use conscientious objection as a means to not sell such medications, despite the fact there is no such provision in the law regulating pharmaceutical market and professions. Access to modern contraceptives is not realized as stated in the law. We urge the Polish government to take all possible measures to guarantee access to modern contraception subsidized from the State budget as well as to include contraceptive counseling in primary health care system.

Finally, the Act on family planning consists of provisions regarding sexuality education that is supposed to be taught at schools. Sexuality education is included in the school curricula under the class on preparation for family life but its realization is not obligatory and most of schools do not conduct such classes. In others it is taught by teachers who are not trained appropriately and based on textbooks that include harmful and non scientifically based information. Therefore there is no sexuality education provided according to international standards that are free of ideology. There are also no sexuality-related services for youths. We urge the Polish government to review the realization of sexual education in public schools, especially the curricula and qualifications of teachers, and amend the relevant provisions to assure comprehensive sexual education as well as provide proper information and services for adolescents as debated at the 45th session of the Commission on Population and Development this April which the Polish government supported.

Thank you Madam President.