



March 22nd , 2013

Dear Mr. Andris Piebalgs,

The international community is today at an important crossroad where decisions about the future of our world are up for debate in numerous fora around the world. The review process of several landmark UN conferences (among them Rio + 20, ICPD Beyond 2014 and the post 2015 development framework) underway is unfolding a radically different world from the one of the 1990s. Today, people around the globe aspire to a participatory model of decision making and claim more involvement in matters of community concern. The impact of the global economic crisis shows that poverty and economic vulnerability is very much a global feature and is interlinked with social concerns affecting all people. This changed landscape requires new responses and fresh approaches to, sometimes old, problems in the future post 2015 development agenda, with a special attention given to the most vulnerable groups: women and young people.

ASTRA Network brings together 31 organizations from 19 countries of Central and Eastern Europe, which advocate for sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) as well as for gender equality. With over 10 years worth of dialogues across the region, ASTRA and its many supporters would like to share with you a couple of concerns that we believe deserve to be included in the new development agenda.

We have monitored the gender equality situation throughout our region and we found that there is a significant gender gap in economic activity rates. This means that more women than men in CEE (both EU and non-EU) are risking poverty, work in underpaid jobs or make no income at all. Moreover, economic inequality is matched by a similar imbalance in access to political power. Out of all our member countries, none is approaching the suggested 30% quota of women parliamentarians. The double bind of economic and political disenfranchisement of women in Central and Eastern Europe translates in a number of social issues, including gender stereotyping, violence against women and other forms of marginalisation and exclusion.

Moreover, women and teen girls are suffering from the consequences of unsafe abortion and unattended or ill-attended childbirth. Women around the region claim that they lack access to respectful, caring, quality health services to which they are entitled as citizens. Few countries provide access to comprehensive sexuality education, a key measure to secure a sense of self-awareness and healthy lifestyle to its populations. A similar scenario of continued ill health and suffering characterises women with HIV/AIDS, women suffering from reproductive cancers or STIs.

In the past few years countries across the region witnessed the resurgence of populist politics with conservative and anti-choice undertones. Legislative attacks on sexual and reproductive rights and initiatives to limit people's rights to make their own sexual and reproductive choices have swept the region with most severe cases noted in Hungary, Poland, The Russian Federation and Ukraine. It is time we address these attacks and commit to promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights and gender equality as core values of the future development agenda.

In order to further elicit evidence based claims, ASTRA Network together with Eastern European Alliance for Reproductive Choice organised a **regional consultation in Moscow on 26-27 of January 2013 on the role of health and SRHR in the post 2015 development agenda**. The full report of the meeting is available [online](#) for your interest.

We, the ASTRA Network members, urge you as the Latvian member of the UN High Level Panel, representing the CEE region, to advocate for women's rights with special emphasis on sexual and reproductive health and rights. We call on the High Level Panel to safeguard the health of women and place it at the core of the post 2015 framework. Our key asks for the future development framework echo the Moscow consultation conclusions and include:

- Attaining the highest standard of Sexual and Reproductive Health for All by adequate policies to ensure access to a range of contraceptive methods, abortion services, pregnancy-related mortality and morbidity interventions; treatment for Sexually Transmitted Infections, HIV/AIDS and reproductive cancers; comprehensive sexuality education. Policies should also enunciate measures against stigma and discrimination associated with the above mentioned;
- Concrete steps towards achieving Rights to Sexual and Reproductive Health and safeguarding Sexual and Reproductive Rights, especially those of adolescents, marginalised groups of women and those with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities;
- Strengthening national health systems and cross-board accessibility to health care; guarantee the implementation of SRHR policies by ensuring the functionality of health systems, allocating adequate budgets, providing pharmaceutical products and providing updated training for health professionals;
- Ensure continued, committed and sustained investment in health, including women's sexual and reproductive health and rights by governments; there needs to be advocacy for political support and to encourage governments to meet the agreed funding requirements to ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health services by and beyond 2015;
- Policy change underpinned by commitment to human rights. Human rights must be put in the center of the new transformative agenda. The post 2015 development agenda on health should include a clear reference to the right to health under international law, and linkages with the relevant UN human rights conventions and mechanisms, key among them ICPD+20;
- Addressing inequalities between the countries and within the countries and responding to the needs of underserved groups. The notion of equity should be the core of the future framework, ensuring that gender equality is

reflected through the lens of the right to health and the right to control one's body, including sexual and reproductive health. The new development agenda needs to be in line with existing international Human Rights such as in the case of sexual and reproductive health and rights, the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in 1994 in Cairo. This should include access to safe and legal abortion, fight against violence and discrimination against women and reducing unmet need for family planning among the people most in need - youth and women living in rural areas.

We greatly appreciate your cooperation and your dedication to women's empowerment and rights.

With warmest wishes,

ASTRA Network

ASTRA Network members: Albania - Albanian Family Planning Association, Armenia - Women's Rights Center, Armenia - Society Without Violence, Armenia - Women's Resource Center, Azerbaijan - Center "Women and Modern World", Belarus - Women's Independent Democratic Movement of Belarus, Bulgaria - Bulgarian Family Planning and Sexual Health Association, Bulgaria - Bulgarian Gender Research Foundation, Bulgaria - Gender Education, Research and Technologies, Bulgaria - Demetra Association, Bulgaria - Gender Alternatives Foundation, Croatia - B.a.b.e. (Be Active, Be Emancipated), Croatia - CESI - Center for Education and Counseling of Woman, Croatia - Women's Room, Georgia - Women's Center, Georgia - Hera XXI, Hungary - PATENT, Kazakhstan - The Legal Center for Women's Initiatives "Sana Sezim", Lithuania - Family Planning and Sexual Health Association, Latvia - Latvia's Association for Family Planning And Sexual Health, Macedonia - Shelter Center, Moldova - Reproductive Health Service Center, Poland - Federation for Women and Family Planning, Romania - Euroregional Center for Public Initiatives; Romania - A.L.E.G., Romania - The East European Institute of Reproductive Health, Romania - AnA: Society for Feminist Analysis, Russia - Novogorod Gender Center, Slovakia - Pro Choice, Ukraine - Women Health and Family Planning, Ukraine - Charitable SALUS Foundation, Uzbekistan - Future Generation.

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