

CEE Bulletin on Sexual and Reproductive Rights *No 4 (60) 2008*

*Sexual and reproductive health and rights constitute fundamental human rights,
form a vital aspect of the women's empowerment
and are key to the achievement of gender equality.*

BURNING ISSUE

Council of Europe calls for decriminalization of abortion. The report on access to safe and legal abortion in Europe will be presented for discussion and vote by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on April, 16, 2008. It has been prepared by the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (PACE) and its rapporteur is Mrs Gisela Wurm from Austria, member of the Socialist Group. The report clearly states that women must have access to safe and legal abortion as the ban on terminations (which is at place in a number of the member states) does not eliminate abortion but leads to the development of the so-called abortion underground. In other words, member states with restrictive anti-abortion law should seriously consider liberalization of provisions. Nevertheless, even in countries that guarantee women's right to choose, the actual access to abortion services is limited by numerous conditions and this problem needs special attention as well. The report accompanied by the declaration urges member states to "adopt appropriate sexual and reproductive health strategies, including access of women and men to contraception at a reasonable cost and of a suitable nature for them as well as compulsory relationships and sex education for young people."

Polish Federation for Women and Family Planning is collecting signatures of supporters of the resolution – individuals and organizations can sign an open letter urging the Parliamentary Assembly to adopt the document.

Draft agenda and tabled report of the next parliamentary assembly are available at: <http://assembly.coe.int/Documents/WorkingDocs/doc08/EDOC11513.pdf>

The draft resolution is available at: <http://assembly.coe.int/ASP/APFeaturesManager/defaultArtSiteView.asp?ID=750>

REGIONAL UPDATE

BULGARIA: The case of human organs trafficking. On March 18, a Bulgarian doctor was arrested in Sofia on the suspicion of involvement in human organs trafficking. According to Sofia's Police department, the accused – Stanislav Hristov – is the Head of the Pathology Department of Aleksandrovska Hospital. The charges filed against him involve serious violations of the regulations of human organs handling and transplantation. The Public Prosecutor's Office demanded detention of the physician while he is awaiting trial. The case has shocked public opinion. The director of the hospital refused to comment the case.

More information is available at:
<http://www.makfax.com.mk/look/novina/article.tpl?IdLanguage=1&IdPublication=2&NrArticle=105475&NrIssue=611&NrSection=20>

Update from Astra Youth. Astra Youth has scheduled strategic meeting at the end of April. Young people from 7 countries will meet in Warsaw, Poland and work on future activities of the organization. We all hope that soon the group will come up with another successful campaign and will continue their run of luck. At the same time, the group is continuing its YES campaign with the objective of promoting safer sex among young people from the CEE region. Street actions aimed at raising awareness have been organized by Astra Youth members in Georgia. Moreover, new members of ASTRA Youth from the Georgian organization HERA XXI are organizing 5 trainings in different places promoting the YES Campaign among youth. On 8th of March at the International Women's Day in Tbilisi, Georgia a group of young activists from "Women's Center" in cooperation with Astra held an action aimed at raising young people's awareness about their sexual and reproductive health and rights. They distributed flowers and leaflets to more than 200 people! This action turned out to be a great success.

CENTRAL ASIA: Urgent action needed now to stop HIV/AIDS epidemic. On March, 11 – 13 a conference on HIV with the participation of governmental representatives took place in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Kyrgyzstan's deputy prime minister, Nur uulu Dosbol has highlighted that there is a need for the scaled up response to a global threat that HIV poses. The epidemic is developing rapidly in Central Asia. In some regions the situation is already dramatic. The research conducted in 2006 indicates that in some regions people living with HIV make up 5 percent of the total population. In fact, the southern region of Osh (Kyrgyzstan) has become the epicenter for new cases. Out of five million population in Kyrgyzstan, over 1500 people are HIV-positive. One third of them live in Osh. In the last six months, 42 children were diagnosed with HIV. Only recently, has the country introduced HIV testing for pregnant women as a precautionary measure. To control the epidemic, a second generation surveillance technique recommended by the World Health Organization is being employed in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. The US government (through the Global Fund and other agencies) plans to finance three programmes that should improve the monitoring of the epidemic. But much more is still needed, especially: guaranteed access to treatment and prevention programmes, as well as more qualified medical consultants and a further reaching strategy for testing individuals.

Source: CCMC PUSH Journal 31/03/2008

GERMANY: The Highest Court upholds incest law. Recently, the German Highest Court examined an appeal from a citizen to lift the ban on incest, which is a criminal offence in the country. Patrick S. from Leipzig is in a sexual relationship with his biological sister and they have four children aged from 6 years to 34 months. The siblings were not raised together. They only met in 2000 when Patrick was 24 and his sister was 16. Patrick was adopted and tracked down his biological mother. That's when the couple got together. Both were charged with incest in 2005 and Patrick spent two years in prison. The woman was placed on probation for one year.

The Federal Constitutional Court ruled that the current incest law is in line with German Constitution. The decision to uphold the ban was also justified with the statement that it protects family order and prevents serious genetic illnesses that could arise from incest.

The lawyer of Patrick S. claimed that the ban on incest is a historic relic and that the couple does not harm anyone with the relationship they established. In fact, one of the judges confirmed that this particular case is complicated and that the law is based on moral beliefs rather than on legal protection.

Source: BBC 13 March 2008

GERMANY: Condomless drugstore. In Fulda (State of Hesse), a famous German tourist destination, there is a pharmacy which does not sell condoms and refers clients to the competition. This drugstore is located in a building owned by the Catholic Church and the ban on selling condoms is included in the rental agreement. The owner of the drugstore attempted to do something about it a number of times but the Church is relentless. This case is another example of how religious beliefs can stay in stark contrast with the right to have unlimited access to sexual and reproductive supplies.

Source: CCMC PUSH Journal 19/03/2008

POLAND: President officially reveals homophobic attitudes. On 17th of March in his proclamation transmitted on TV, President Kaczyński attacked same-sex relations as a threat to 'moral order' in the country. Kaczyński is known from his conservative views and highly controversial position on same-sex relations. The President's message concerned the adoption of the European Charter of Fundamental Rights which includes a clear ban on the discrimination of LGBTQI. Kaczyński spoke against ratifying the European Union Reform Treaty (Lisbon Treaty) as it includes provisions that might lead to the legalization of same-sex partnerships in Poland. The visual material which accompanied the proclamation used pictures of the Canadian marriage ceremony of the American gay couple (Brendan Fay and Thomas Moulton). Brendan Fay voiced his outrage and urges Kaczyński to send official apologies. The Polish Prime Minister, Donald Tusk disapproved of the President's views.

Source: Gazeta Wyborcza Daily, 21/03/2008

PORTUGAL: Murder of transsexual woman. A second transphobia-driven crime has been reported in Portugal. In February, the body of a transsexual woman was found in a rubber dumpster in Lisbon. Originally Brazilian, Luna, 42, had been a resident and a worker in Portugal for years. The nature of the crime is being examined by the police, but it is suspected that transsexuality was an important motive. The woman was also a prostitute at Conde de Redondo area in Lisbon. Transsexual people are more exposed to violence than the rest of population. It is fueled by prejudice and hatred. Two years ago a similar crime took place in Portugal - Gisberta from Oporto was killed. Pink Panthers – Combat front against GayLesBiTransphobia has issued an international call for action to end transphobia and violence against transsexuals.

More information is available at: <http://20six.fr/trans-ftm-gay>

UNITED KINGDOM: Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) threaten young people's health. Health Protection Scotland has announced the newest statistics on STDs. They are alarming as the constant rise in infections is observed especially among young people. What is even more alarming is that STDs are spreading onto children as well. Health Protection Scotland reports cases of children under 15 years of age diagnosed with STDs. The researches studied three STDs – gonorrhoea, herpes and, the most common STD, chlamydia. In case of the first two, there is a significant alarming rise in numbers – up by 18 percent. Cases of gonorrhoea have actually doubled in the last decade from 496 (in 1998) to 1015 (last year). Apparently, chlamydia statistics have at least leveled off, though the disease is still on the rise in general. Health Protection Scotland is especially alarmed by the fact that more and more young people are affected by diseases. It turned out that the most vulnerable group consists of people in their twenties.

The rise in the reported numbers might also be partly attributed to increased awareness of the need for testing. More people are now likely to check their health status. This is a positive trend, as it might help to stop the further spreading of STDs. Nevertheless, good access to sexual health services must be guaranteed in order to stop STDs. Better quality sex education is also needed. What worries researchers most is that even if young people have knowledge on STDs, it does not necessarily change their behavioral patterns. Unsafe sex is the most burning problem and there is a need for creative and effective campaigns to stop it.

Source: CCMC PUSH Journal 31/03/2008

UNITED KINGDOM: Call to lift the ban on gay blood donations. There is growing opposition against the discrimination of gays by the National Blood Service. Gay people have a lifetime long ban on donating blood. Recently the media reported an individual case of a man who was willing to help his nephew who needed transfusions of a significant amount of blood in order to survive. Russel Hirst was not allowed to help him because of his sexual orientation. The man was healthy and the ban is completely absurd, and, in this case, even threatened the life of the receiver of blood donation. The case provoked a debate in the United Kingdom and there are more and more voices from the civil society to lift the obviously discriminative provision. The National Blood Service claims that there is evidence that sexually active gays are more likely to transmit the HIV virus. The blood samples are of course tested after being collected but the problem is that if the infection happened just prior to testing (3 months) the results will not be reliable. The ban is simply based on the presumption that gays are more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviours – a stereotypical assumption opposed by civil rights activists.

Source: BBC News, 07 March 2008

GLOBAL UPDATE

Geneva: Paul Hunt presents report to Human Rights Council (HRC). At the end of his term as UN Special Rapporteur on the Highest Attainable Standard to Physical and Mental Health, Paul Hunt has presented his report which includes strong language on sexual and reproductive health and rights. His term officially ends in June 2008. The report highlights that the states have obligations to guarantee citizens a minimum basket of health-related services that must include sexual and reproductive services (namely access to information, family planning, prenatal and postnatal services). As a Special Rapporteur, Paul Hunt has also supported a women's right to choose. He argues that states are obliged to help women procure abortions which should be safe and accessible. Hunt has also supported the recently developed Yogyakarta Principles that elaborate rights of LGBTQI. Due to his strong focus on sexual and reproductive health and rights, Paul Hunt faced strong critique from the conservative governments that claim that there is no consensus on abortion in the United Nations and do not recognize the right to choose to be a human right of women.

Full report authored by Paul Hunt is available at: <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G08/105/03/PDF/G0810503.pdf?OpenElement>

A New Agenda for Girls' and Women's Health and Rights for the new US administration. As the United States recognizes March as Women's History Month, the International Women's Health Coalition (IWHC) also recognizes that the United States needs a new agenda for international cooperation on women's health and rights. In a paper released by the IWHC and the Better World Campaign, "A New Agenda for Girls' and Women's Health and Rights",

IWHC President Adrienne Germain outlines concrete steps for action by the next U.S. Administration on urgent global issues facing women and girls. On Day One of the next Administration, the new U.S. President should: protect the human rights of women, help guarantee every woman's right to health care; and empower girls and women against HIV/AIDS. IWHC is also expecting to hear civil society's views and ideas on the actions and policies that need to be undertaken by the new US administration. *If there is something that you would like to share, please feel free to contact IWHC at the On Day One website:* <http://www.odayone.org/node/904>

For the full text of A New Agenda for Girls' and Women's Health and Rights by Adrienne Germain go to:

<http://www.iwhc.org/docUploads/A%20New%20Agenda%20for%20Girls%27%20and%20Women%27s%20Health%20and%20Rights.pdf>

Outcomes of the 52nd Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), 25 February – 7 March, 2008, New York, USA. This session was devoted to the topic of Financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women. The result of the session is the document called Agreed Conclusions. However, the women's movement stays argues that the language of this document regarding financing for the empowerment of women is far too weak. It does not provide concrete obligations for member states to provide funding and thus leaves much to be desired. During the session women's rights advocates were also campaigning for the UN Gender Equality Architecture Reform (GEAR). The campaign was successful as over 40 countries spoke to the need to strengthen the United Nations' institutional mechanisms on gender equality and called for consolidated women's entity led by an Under Secretary General and with extensive country presence in their national statements.

For more information about the session visit CSW's website at: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/>

To learn more about GEAR campaign go to: <http://www.gadnetwork.org.uk/pdfs/Sept07/GEAR%20Campaign%20Statement.pdf>

Vacancy: Director of the European Institute for Gender Equality. The position is Vilnius-based (Lithuania) and the application deadline is April 22, 2008. Good command of English is a must. The term lasts 5 years. Only EU citizens are eligible to apply. The primary objective of the European Institute for Gender Equality is to promote and advance gender equality and eradicate gender-based discrimination. It will develop appropriate methodological tools for the integration of gender equality into all Community policies, as well as raise awareness on these issues among European Union citizens. What might be useful for the women's movement is that the Institute will be responsible for facilitating dialogue between different stakeholders.

Full information available at: http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/personnel_administration/working_senior_mgt_en.htm#2008_10062

UPCOMING EVENTS

41st session of the Commission on Population and Development (CPD), April, 7 – 11, 2008, New York, US. The priority theme of this year's CPD is 'Population distribution, urbanization, internal migration and development'.

Provisional agenda is available at: <http://www.un.org/esa/population/cpd/cpd2008/comm2008.htm>

Conference on Feminist Research Methods, February, 4-9, 2009, Stockholm University, Sweden. The Centre for Gender Studies at Stockholm University welcomes feminist researchers to an international conference on research methods and methodological issues and dilemmas. It is devoted to the exchange of experiences and innovations in feminist research, specifically the methods and research tools we use. The conference is open to researchers in all disciplines, inter-disciplines and directions of research. All interested participants are welcome to suggest sessions, workshops and other types of events. Dead-line for suggestions of events within the conference is April 1. Deadline for papers, programme, details of registration, and practical information will be announced on the web site in April.

For more information go to: <http://www.kvinfo.su.se/femmet09/>

or contact: femmet09@kvinfo.su.se

2008 Medico-legal convening in response to sexual violence, June, 2-5, 2008, Nairobi, Kenya. The workshop aims at strengthening the medico-legal response to sexual violence through multi-disciplinary collaboration among organisations and partners in Eastern, Central and Southern Africa. This workshop is a collaborative activity between Liverpool VCT Care & Treatment, Sexual Violence Research Initiative and Gender Based Violence Prevention Network with support from the Hewlett Foundation.

For more information contact Jessica Kizungu at jessicah@liverpoolvct.org

PUBLICATIONS

Bringing rights to bear by Center for Reproductive Rights. Bringing Rights to Bear, a signature publication of the Center, has been updated and redesigned. Initially published in 2002, Bringing Rights to Bear takes a long, hard look at the thousands of comments, statements, and recommendations produced by UN treaty monitoring bodies, and analyzes their potential for advancing reproductive rights. The 2008 update, produced as a series of independent briefing papers, reflects the growing recognition among these UN bodies that reproductive rights are firmly grounded in international human rights treaties. The more flexible layout allows audiences with more tailored thematic interests to receive only the information they require.

Updated briefing papers are available at: <http://www.reproductiverights.org/index.html>

Human Rights Report 2007. It is annual publication of the U.S. Congress that examines human rights performance of 194 countries. It has been officially announced this month by the US State Secretary Condoleezza Rice.

It is available in the electronic version at: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/>

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