



Charges against Polish woman human rights defender, Justyna Wydrzyńska, must be dropped

As members of the European Parliament we express grave concern at the criminal charges brought against a prominent Polish woman human rights defender, Justyna Wydrzyńska. She could face up to three years in prison if convicted of assisting with an abortion.

Justyna Wydrzyńska is one of the founders of an activist collective, the Abortion Dream Team, which provides advice to women in Poland seeking abortion care, and has been supporting women with information about safe abortion methods since 2006 in accordance to the World Health Organization's recommendations.

Justyna Wydrzyńska has been charged under Poland's draconian anti-abortion law for having provided medical abortion pills to another woman. Poland criminalises anyone who aids someone with having an abortion outside the very limited scope of the law.

We are deeply concerned that the charges against Justyna Wydrzyńska appear intended to punish her work as a woman human rights defender and to instil fear among all of those who are supporting women in accessing safe abortion care. Human rights defenders advocating for sexual and reproductive rights in Poland are working in an increasingly hostile and dangerous environment where they face smear campaigns and threats to their lives.

Access to abortion has become increasingly difficult in Poland following the ruling of the politically compromised Constitutional Tribunal that took effect in January 2021 resulting in a de facto ban on abortion. Even women who meet the strict requirements for an abortion under the law – for example when their pregnancy results from sexual assault – are often unable to obtain the care they need. The highly restrictive and stigmatising environment forces women to seek alternative ways to end a pregnancy, by traveling outside of Poland or even resorting to unsafe abortion. Thousands are turning to civil society organisations for information and support and those organizations are a lifeline to safe abortion access.

The recent arrival in Poland of more than 2,3 million refugees from Ukraine, many of whom are women and girls, means that the need for safe abortion care and other essential sexual and reproductive health services is urgent, especially as many refugees have reportedly experienced sexual violence.

International human rights standards clearly require the decriminalization of abortion and that no one is punished for assisting with safe abortion care. The European Parliament in 2020 called on the Member States to decriminalise abortion, as well as to remove and combat obstacles to legal abortion and to review their national legal provisions on abortion and bring them into line with international human rights standards and regional best practices.

We call on the Polish authorities to drop all charges against Justyna Wydrzyńska immediately and to cease targeting human rights defenders in Poland, in particular the defenders of sexual and reproductive rights.

We continue to urge the Polish authorities to reform its law on abortion and to ensure that all women in Poland have access to quality and affordable sexual and reproductive health services.

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