

ACPD

The Council of Europe on Wednesday called for women throughout its 47 member states to be guaranteed the right to "safe and legal" abortion despite objections from Poland and other nations.

After a marathon four-hour debate and decisions on 72 amendments, the parliamentary assembly of the council (PACE) called for the legalization of abortion in any member country where it was still illegal.

The assembly voted 102 to 69 in favor of the resolution.

Whilst most member states permit abortion where the life of the mother is at risk, there are several, including Andorra, Ireland, Malta, Monaco and Poland, where abortion is illegal or severely restricted, PACE said in a report by Austrian parliamentarian Gisela Wurm.

The resolution stresses that abortion should "in no circumstances be regarded as a family planning method," but warned that a total ban led to traumatic clandestine abortions and abortion "tourism".

The parliamentarians said women seeking an abortion should receive suitable financial cover, as well as medical and psychological care, and conditions which restricted access to safe abortion should be lifted.

The resolution denounces what it calls "de facto inaccessibility" due to the high cost of abortions, or un-hygienic or overcrowded facilities.

The resolution also calls for school pupils to receive "compulsory, age-appropriate, gender-sensitive education on sex and relationships," to cut down on unwanted pregnancies and abortions.

One in five pregnancies worldwide end in abortion, with over half of terminations in the developing world carried out under unsafe conditions, according to an October 2007 study in The Lancet medical journal.

France, Sweden and Britain have the highest EU rates of abortion.

Source: Agence France Presse, April 16, 2008