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Statement (Poland): “Our Bodies, Our Lives, Our Country, the World”

Women across Poland are rising up against a barbaric assault by Catholic clergy and their friends in government

Saturday 14 November 2020, by [MALISZ Zofia](#), [Razem](#) (Date first published: 30 October 2020).

Last Thursday, the Polish Constitutional Tribunal outlawed pregnancy termination in cases of severe and fatal congenital diseases of the fetus. Its verdict violates fundamental human rights and sentences generations of Polish women to personal tragedies and torture. Massive protests have erupted all around the country and abroad, including in smaller municipalities and conservative regions.

Polish public opinion had been, and continues to be, overwhelmingly against restrictions on abortion. In fact, the majority wants all restrictions lifted. Razem and the Left caucus in the Polish parliament are now set to prevent the penalisation of medical personnel or private persons that continue to assist in performing abortions. This is a first remedial measure along with a continued Razem campaign, now more urgent than ever, for the universal and unconditional right to pregnancy termination until the 12th week of gestation for all Polish women, no matter their material status.

The ruling of the politicised Constitutional Tribunal has enormous implications for Polish women — their health, their lives, their families, and their livelihoods. Women who carry fetuses unable to survive ex utero will be forced to deliver and witness their death, if not devote their lives to the severe disabilities of their children. The verdict will also have consequences for access to prenatal diagnostic procedures and research that will likely move to private clinics.

The laws that preceded this ruling were already oppressive: In 2014, a group of mothers with of disabled children — desperate for support from the state — occupied the parliament in an act of courageous rebellion.

The Tribunal’s ruling marks another barbaric assault on women’s lives and bodies — the most aggressive invasion of their lives to date by the Catholic clergy and their secular allies currently in power.

The ruling is also an assault on Poland’s democratic institutions. It has been also quite apparent to the public eye that this de facto abortion ban was enacted via legislative trickery — a glaring act of authoritarian intervention, dismantling the institutions of the judiciary in the service of the United Right coalition (Zjednoczona Prawica).

This is not their first try. Catholic fundamentalist lobby groups, with the explicit support of the Church, have fought doggedly to ban abortion in some form or another. But they have so far failed, beaten back by mass mobilization of women across Poland — most notably in 2016, during the Black Protest co-organised by Razem.

That is why the governing right-wing coalition executed their plan not through a parliamentary procedure — but via the Constitutional Tribunal, packed with their most extreme political allies.

The act destroyed the so-called “abortion compromise”, a reproductive rights law of 1993. One of the most restrictive abortion laws in Europe, it had likewise been enacted via a clientelist exchange with the Catholic Church by the new post-Solidarność ruling elite. A petition of 1.4 million signatures to keep abortion legal was not even considered at the time.

Now, crowds of women and their allies are taking to the streets and to the churches to make clear that the ban is one step too far in the mistreatment of women by the conservative and religious elements in the country.

Make no mistake: there is a popular movement rising in Poland. A taxi driver union took part in the protest, farmers drove their tractors in a file in support of women, and even some football fans joined the unrest. The scale of the protests — particularly the fact that they have spilled into small municipalities where it is often the task of individual women to organise demonstrations via social media, against the intimidation of local authorities and clergy — show that a dam has been broken.

Razem rejects this abhorrent law. We take active part in the protest standing next to Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet (Polish Women on Strike) and other feminist and allied organisations. Road blockades, strikes, and marches have taken place and are planned every day since the ruling. We execute our right to demonstrate in compliance with official recommendations regarding the pandemic.

Together with the left caucus in the Polish Sejm, we demanded that a bill regarding the de-penalisation of medical personnel and private persons that continue to perform abortions be put on the parliament’s agenda. Female parliamentarians of the left occupied the lectern shouting and waving placards with womens’ demands in the direction of Jarosław Kaczyński - the leader of the United Right, widely considered the de facto decision maker in Polish politics.

Subsequently, Kaczyński came on television in a rare appearance and called on his supporters to push back. He deflected responsibility of his political side for the verdict by claiming that Poland’s moral essence is Catholic, appealing to defend churches and fight a “nihilism that clearly shows signs of preparation or even training” echoing Donald Trump’s fantasies of a violent, radical opponent.

We organise our membership around peaceful but determined response. We take aim at those directly responsible for the attack on womens’ fundamental rights — the fundamentalist lobbyists and the politicians that supported the ban at any stage before and after it came to pass. In the parliament, we continue to fight for the unconditional right for Polish women to terminate their pregnancy for any reason, and for free, until the 12th week of gestation. A woman’s right to decide about her body, to protect her health and her life is paramount — and there will be no return to any compromise.

We call on friends, allies, and comrades around the world to organise. Recently, we learned that the US president’s personal lawyer Jay Sekulow has been pouring millions of dollars into fighting womens’ and LGBT rights in all of Europe, including Poland. The only way we stop the global reactionist wave is together, in streets everywhere, demanding what is ours: our bodies, our lives, our country, the world.

Zofia Malisz, Razem, 30.10.2020

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<https://progressive.international/wire/2020-10-30-razem-our-bodies-our-lives-our-country-the-world/en>

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Photo: Grzegorz Zukowski