

Statement of the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF)

United Nations Human Rights Council

33rd Session, 13 September – 30 September 2016

Item 6:

Universal Periodic Report (Ireland)

Mr. President,

This statement is made on behalf of the Irish Family Planning Association, the Irish Council for Civil Liberties, the National Women's Council, the Abortion Rights Campaign, and the Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment, a coalition of over 60 civil society organisations.

We welcome the State's positive engagement in the UPR. However, we remain seriously concerned at Ireland's decision to reject 16 of the 17 recommendations regarding abortion raised by member states. These recommendations are fully consistent with the views of the expert human rights bodies that have examined Ireland's abortion laws and concluded that they fall far short of the requirements of its international obligations. Since 2011, the Committee Against Torture, the Human Rights Committee, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Committee on the Rights of the Child have all recommended that Ireland bring its laws into conformity with international human rights standards by decriminalising abortion and ensuring that women have access to abortion in Ireland on wider grounds than only where there is risk to a pregnant woman's life.

Irish abortion laws harm women's health and cannot be reconciled with women's right to reproductive health. Since 1980, at least 165,000 women and girls have travelled abroad to access abortion. In addition to the harms to women's health this involves, each woman must carry the entire financial, practical and emotional burdens of doing so. These burdens fall most heavily on minors, women on low incomes, and women who cannot travel freely to another state; these women disproportionately experience delays in accessing services. This is unacceptable.

Women in Ireland have the right to access the highest level of reproductive healthcare, including abortion services. The Government is committed to a citizens' assembly. While this will consider the constitutional provision that stands in the way of the introduction of abortion services, a deliberative forum is not sufficient to fulfil the recommendations made by member states and UN treaty monitoring bodies, nor will it satisfy the State's obligations under international human rights law.

We urge the State to prioritise all necessary steps to reform Ireland's constitution and legislation, including the calling of a referendum, to fully protect the reproductive rights of women and girls in Ireland, including access to safe and legal abortion services.

Thank you Mr. President.