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Universal Periodic Review – Russia – Adoption of UPR outcome on Russia, 20 September 2013

Mr. President, I speak on behalf of the Center for Reproductive Rights¹.

We welcome Russia's acceptance of Slovenia's recommendation on putting in place comprehensive and evidence-based sexual and reproductive health education programs, and urge Russia to ensure this subject becomes a mandatory part of the school curriculum. At present the quality of sexuality education in schools varies widely and the information is often biased and not evidence-based. We would also like to highlight other key areas of concern related to reproductive rights:

Firstly, women face barriers in their access to reproductive health services, including contraception and abortion. For instance, victims of sexual violence are systematically denied crucial services, including emergency contraception. Contraceptives are not covered by public health insurance and its high cost constitutes a major barrier, in particular for women from marginalized groups.

Barriers in access to legal abortion were introduced in 2011. One of them is a mandatory waiting period of up to 7 days for women seeking a first trimester abortion. According to the WHO, medically unnecessary waiting periods constitute a barrier to accessing legal abortions, and demean women as competent decision-makers. In addition, the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs issued guidelines that include instructions on psychological counseling of pregnant women seeking abortion. These guidelines are biased and provide incomplete information on women's lawful choices.

Furthermore, marginalized women are particularly vulnerable to reproductive rights violations. For example, pregnant women drug users are pressured to give up their infants upon birth or are systematically pressured to terminate their pregnancies, due to the widespread but false belief that they cannot give birth to healthy babies.

In the process of implementing the UPR recommendations, we urge the government to remedy these human rights violations by developing laws and policies that guarantee access to affordable and acceptable reproductive health services to all women. Thank you.

¹ CRR is an international non-governmental legal advocacy organization dedicated to the advancement of reproductive freedom as a fundamental human right that all governments are legally obliged to protect, respect, and fulfill.