

Source

A

Web Images Videos Maps News Shopping Gmail more

Sign in

Hosted by Google

Search News

Medvedev OKs law warning of abortion health risks

By DAVID NOWAK, Associated Press — Jul 15, 2011

MOSCOW (AP) — Russia has for the first time placed regulations on the largely unrestricted practice of abortion, requiring clinics to warn potential clients of the purported health hazards of the procedure.

A new law signed Thursday by President Dmitry Medvedev is seen by some observers as possibly the first in a series of new rules governing abortion. (1)

Russia has among the highest abortion rates in the world, a major contributor to a worrying population decline that the Kremlin is under massive pressure to stop.

Free abortion is available at any licensed medical clinic in the country and at any term in the pregnancy, though late termination is only permitted on grounds of severe health risks to the mother or fetal abnormalities. (2)

That liberal policy was instituted in the Soviet era when pregnancy termination was practically the only form of birth control and condoms were unreliable, of poor quality and seldom used. That policy is now coming under serious attack for the first time by increasingly vocal conservatives backed by the resurgent Russian Orthodox Church, which is pushing for an outright ban on abortion.

The debate in Russia hasn't achieved the ubiquity and fierceness of the United States, but it's unlikely to recede, given the influence of the Church and the fact that deaths exceed births in this country.

The issue has remained on the agenda, despite lawmakers in June recalling a Church-proposed bill seeking a ban on free abortions at government-run clinics and the prohibition of the sale of the morning-after pill without a prescription.

According to a United Nations survey in 2004, Russia had the world's highest abortion rate: 53.7 per 100 women. (3)

Figures from the Russian Health Ministry suggest the rate may have declined in recent years, though it remains high: In 2009, there were 74 abortions for every 100 births in Russia, a significant drop in comparison with 169 abortions per 100 births in 2000. (4)

The total number of abortions recorded by the Health Ministry in 2009 reached nearly 1.3 million. (5)

The Russian population, which currently stands at 143 million, has shrunk by about 5.7 million since the fall of the Soviet Union in a plunge also blamed on rampant alcoholism, bad diets and lack of exercise. (6)

The Kremlin on its website didn't mention demographics in its explanation of the law, which forces clinics to devote 10 percent of any advertising space to warnings, justifying the move only in terms of "protecting the health of the woman" against the possible risks.

But Medvedev has made redressing the birth-death ratio one of the key goals of his presidency, and his wife, Svetlana, is a noted pro-life proponent.

Copyright © 2011 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Related articles

Britain promotes media advertising for abortion whilst Russia attempts to curb it
National Right to Life News - 6 days ago

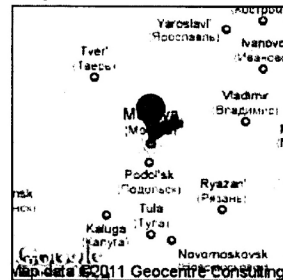
Medvedev OKs law warning of abortion health risks
Lancaster Newspapers - 6 days ago

Russia opens internal waterways for foreign vessels
Shanghai Daily (subscription) - Jul 15, 2011

More coverage (1) »

AP Associated Press

Map



Add News to your Google Homepage

Russia turns spotlight on abortion

By Robert Greenall
BBC News Online

Russia could be on the point of a significant change in direction on morality and sexual issues, as a major debate looms over the rights of women and unborn children.

A government resolution on abortion, approved last month, is the first restriction of any kind on the practice since a ban imposed by Stalin was lifted in 1955.

Russia is currently estimated to have nearly 13 terminations for every 10 live births, and the highest abortion rate in Europe after Romania.

The resolution, which went virtually unnoticed in the country's media, envisages restrictions on women's access to abortion after 12 weeks.

The resolution is the first step towards an attack on the rights of women
Inga Grebesheva
Family Planning Association

It is being hailed by anti-abortionists as a first step towards recognition of the rights of the unborn child.

Alexander Chuyev, a pro-life campaigner and independent deputy in the State Duma, described it as a "small victory".

But some pro-choice campaigners see it as the thin end of the wedge.

"The resolution is the first step towards an attack on the rights of women," Russian Family Planning Association director Inga Grebesheva told BBC News Online.

Previously, women in Russia could receive an abortion between 12 and 22 weeks of pregnancy by citing 13 special circumstances, including divorce, poverty and poor housing.

These have now been reduced to four:

- Rape
- Imprisonment
- Death or severe disability of husband
- Court ruling stripping of woman of parental rights

The measure is now irreversible, although it has still to go through the bureaucratic machinery of the Ministry of Health before it can be put into practice.

It may be that this will not make much of a dent in the overall statistics - officially only 7% of women who seek abortions do so between 12 and 22 weeks of pregnancy.

But Mr Chuyev told BBC News Online he was now pushing for a law to protect the rights of children, including the unborn.

Russia has every resource it needs to address social problems, if it wants to survive
Juliette Engels
Miramed institute

He hopes that any new measure will provide for the right to medical help for both the mother and the child, potentially making it harder for women to abort for medical reasons - something which has not been affected by the current resolution.

One factor which may have given the pro-lifers' message more resonance with the government is the rapid decline in Russia's population, which could shrink by as much as 30 million in the next few decades.