

Health Minister, Ensure My Reproductive Rights

March 8, 2019: New Delhi | Prominent members of the [Pratigya Campaign for Gender Equality and Safe Abortion](#), met with **Ms Vandana Gurnani, Joint Secretary- RCH, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW)** today to submit a [petition](#), which has been signed by **17, 341 individuals** across the globe (**of which 14,000 are from India**). The petition addressed to **Shri J.P. Nadda, Minister of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India** seeks **urgent policy clarification and action to address the serious barrier currently faced by women in exercising their reproductive rights in the country.**

A delegation comprising of prominent civil society groups- [Centre for Reproductive Rights](#), [Foundation for Reproductive Health Services India](#) and [Global Health Strategies](#), representing [Pratigya](#) met with **Ms Vandana Gurnani** and emphasised upon the immediate need to clarify that the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act, **does not require judicial authorisation for abortion** and issue human rights-based guidance for medical providers in determining whether a woman qualifies for an abortion under the MTP Act.

The delegation highlighted that these actions are essential to uphold women’s reproductive rights and place decision-making about their health and bodies back in the hands of women and girls in discussion with their own healthcare providers.

“Over the past few years a large number of women have been approaching the courts to seek approval for an abortion, even though the Section 5 of the MTP Act allows a doctor to terminate a pregnancy at any gestation, to save the life of a woman. Many women and girls have been forced to go to courts even when the gestation is less than 20 weeks. This trend is worrying because it is creating an impression that there is a need for judicial authorisation for abortions,” said Mr. VS Chandrashekar, CEO, [Foundation for Reproductive Health Services, India](#).

Specifically the petition asks for policy clarification that

- a.** Issue a circular clarifying that the August 2017 circular on the establishment of medical boards does not create a requirement of judicial authorizations for MTP at any stage; and
- b.** Introduce guidelines that establish a human rights-based procedural framework for medical providers in giving medical opinions as required under the MTP Act at all stages of pregnancy that is (1) time sensitive and (2) women-centric, including clarifying the importance of


considering women’s and girls’ own perceptions of risk to their physical or mental health or lives from continuation of pregnancy.

“Every woman must be ensured the autonomy to make decisions about her own body and her sexual and reproductive health, which is essential to her being an empowered and equal citizen. Through this petition, we join over 17,000 women in India and their supporters in calling for an end to third party authorization requirements for abortion and clear introduction of guidelines that establish human rights-based procedural framework for medical providers in giving medical opinions as required by the Act,” expressed, **Payal Shah, Regional Director (Acting), Asia Programme, Centre for Reproductive Rights.**

The Ministry reiterated its commitment towards improving rights and health of women and said, “Let us work together in building the confidence of the provider. There is a need for more advocacy, confidence building and sensitization at all levels.”

Issuing a clarification would be a proactive step towards realising the government’s agenda to achieve equality, and send a strong message globally of its dedication towards protecting women’s health and rights.

.....**end of release**.....



is a network of individuals and organisations that have been working at the national and state level on issues of women’s empowerment and enabling women’s access to healthcare services. Pratigya focuses upon finding common ground that simultaneously addresses the serious issue of gender biased sex selection while protecting women’s rights. For more information please visit www.pratigyacampaign.org. The list of all partner organisations of Pratigya can be [accessed here](#).

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