

Dear Mr. N.P Singh, Mr. Ashish Golwankar and Ms Shabina Khan,

We the undersigned, members of Pratigya – Campaign for Gender Equality and Safe Abortion, have seen the advertorial by Sony Entertainment Television's in today's Times of India for its program "Zindagi Ke Crossroads" and the preview of the same on you tube. As a group that works to safe guard women's rights, we are disturbed since we believe it is inflammatory, misleading, and discriminatory towards women and stigmatizes abortion and abortion seekers.

While we appreciate and applaud your courage and interest in addressing this important and sensitive issue, we would like to draw attention to the following:

1. It stigmatizes Abortion by linking it to "killing her own child" (as mentioned in the ad's headline) giving an impression that abortion is a criminal and illegal act. The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, allows women to seek an abortion up to 20 weeks gestation for a range of conditions including when "there is a substantial risk that if the child were born, it would suffer from such physical or mental abnormalities as to be seriously handicapped" (Section, sub-section 2 b ii). We acknowledge that the fact that abortion is legal is mentioned by the doctor (Ragini), however given the emotional scenes, we are afraid it is likely to be completely missed by the audiences.
2. The decision to terminate a pregnancy is made by the women and the provider and the MTP Act guarantees confidentiality to women. **By putting Neha & Rahul Mehra's situation (fictional characters, but given the nature of the program based on actual situation) issue in public domain, debating it and inviting viewers to share their opinion on a personal and private issue, the advertisement and program violates the MTP Act which guarantees confidentiality to women who seek abortion.**
3. In recent times, many women and providers have sought the approval of the Supreme Court of India to terminate pregnancies over 20 weeks gestation when fetal abnormalities were discovered. In many such cases the Supreme Court of India has permitted termination of pregnancies keeping the woman's interest at the centre of the decision. This can be seen in the judgments of Meera Santosh Pal, Ms X, Mrs X, Ms Z and a host of other decisions. **The law is absolutely clear that the decision is based on medical opinion and the consent of the pregnant woman is primary. By opening this up and debating this in public, we believe the program is committing a contempt of court.**
4. The advertorial and promo video is prioritizing "Motherhood" over women's choice and is therefore doing great **injustice to women, their rights and gender equality.** Unfortunately it perpetuates existing stereotype of women's role of a wife and child bearer. This is absolutely discriminatory against women and violation of their individuality and rights. Rights that have been guaranteed by many international conventions and agreements including – The

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), International Conference on Population Development, Beijing Declaration and Sustainable Development goals, all of which India is a signatory to.

5. **The recent landmark judgement of the Supreme Court of India on privacy, recognizes that decisions relating to reproductive autonomy which includes the decision to seek Medical Termination of Pregnancy/abortion is covered under the Right to Privacy and by bringing an individual's case in public domain, even where it is presumed to be fictitious, we believe is a violation of the Supreme Court Judgement**

We strongly believe that the advertorial and program content (as inferred by the preview promo) stigmatizes abortion, abortion seekers and is a violation of women's rights and privacy. By equating abortion to "killing her own child" gives an impression that abortion, which is legal in India, is a serious crime and questions the choice of over 15 million women in India who choose to terminate a pregnancy, annually .

We believe Sony Entertainment Television, as a responsible and respected media house, does not intend to spread incorrect messages or devalue women and their rights. A lack of understanding of all aspects might have resulted in release of the advertisement and content of the program. We, therefore call upon you to:

1. Refrain from releasing such advertisements in future.
2. If feasible, delay telecast of this program, so that the above mentioned issues could be addressed.
3. If the telecast cannot be deferred, we request you to make it clear to viewers that: Abortion is legal in India for a range of reasons including fetal abnormalities; You support women's rights, autonomy, individuality and their ability to make informed choices regarding their bodies and when and how many children to have; and the program does not have any intention of stigmatizing abortions, abortion seekers or abortion providers and you respect the rights accorded under the honorable Supreme Court judgements and the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act

We look forward to a positive response from you and Pratigya would be happy to provide any support you may need to deliver correct information on this issue to your audiences.

Thank you very much for your time and patience.

With Best regards

For and on behalf of Pratigya- Campaign for Gender Equality and Safe Abortions

Anjali Nayyar, Anubha Rastogi, Chandrashekar V.S, Dr Jaydeep Tank, Dr Nozer Sheriar and Vinoj Manning