On the 23rd October, 2018, a group of English MP’s led by Labour Party MP Diana Johnston introduced a bill calling for full decriminalisation of the Northern Ireland abortion laws. This is an attack on our right as Northern Ireland people to decide whether we uphold or reject such legislation as constituting our own laws on abortion. It is a blatant attempt to undermine the democratic rights of the people of Northern Ireland to decide our own laws as enshrined in the Good Friday Agreement. In the first instance, it was not for English MP’s to interfere in the affairs of Northern Ireland. Secondly, the pro-choice lobby of Amnesty International and Sinn Fein aligned themselves with these MP’s in order to rush through changes to the current abortion laws without our consent.

By taking advantage of the fact that the NI Assembly is not sitting, they were attempting to impose their particular view on the electorate of the province in respect of the abortion issue. Even after the Abortion Bill was defeated on its second reading there is still a concerted and ever present threat to the current NI abortion laws which provide protection for both mother and child.

The English Peer, Lord Alton has already condemned such meddling by Westminster in our democracy as tantamount to treating Northern Ireland as if we are a remote and backward region, fictionally incapable of framing our own laws and determining our own future democratically and has called for this matter to be decided by ourselves alone.

In 2008, Dr Ian Paisley, Gerry Adams, Sir Reg Empey and Mark Durkan signed a letter sent to all MPs from England, Scotland and Wales stating that: “the imposition of legislation on abortion that excluded the Assembly from having a say would undoubtedly undermine the integrity of the devolution process and significantly would reduce public confidence in the political progress we’ve made.”

The present-day leaders of the above main political parties in Northern Ireland must be held accountable for the above statements made by their predecessors and told in clear terms that nothing has changed. Their parties signed up to the full terms of the GFA and their parties must fully abide by it. No Westminster interference must be allowed to undermine our cherished democracy.

No discussion of our abortion laws should take place until the Stormont Assembly is returned. It is therefore a priority of all parties to promote the return to Stormont of all political parties involved in the current political deadlock to decide this matter once and for all. Political lobbying for changes without even full public consultations ie. a full referendum comparable to southern Ireland should not be allowed to replace proper democratic and mandated institutions. This is too sensitive and important an issue to be decided by Westminster alone and a cabal of pro-abortion politicians.

As a human rights defender with a background in human rights and international law, I call upon all MP’s throughout the UK to respect the regional autonomy of Northern Ireland and its democratic right to decide this matter for itself by rejecting this bill outright, thereby reaffirming the right of the Northern Ireland people alone to decide this matter in accordance with the terms of the Good Friday Agreement and the powers invested in the Northern Ireland Assembly.

December 2018