In response to the request for evidence by the Women and Equalities Committee ‘Abortion in Northern Ireland’ Inquiry, I would like to make the following points.

[1] The law in relation to abortion in Northern Ireland should be determined by the Northern Ireland Assembly, rather than by Westminster government.

Although the Assembly is currently suspended, the governance of the province has not been replaced by direct rule, and it would therefore be presumptuous and arrogant of the British government to seek to impose revised abortion laws and policies over the heads of the Northern Irish people.

Instead, the government and Parliament should be directing their energies towards restoring the Assembly, so that it can resume the exercise of all the powers granted to it under its original mandate.

[2] Research has shown that the current law on abortion in Northern Ireland saves lives. One estimate puts the number of individuals alive today in the province is 100,000 more than it would have been had the provisions of the 1967 Abortion Act been adopted in the province. [Both Lives Matter, 2017. While acknowledging that the figure of 100,000 was an estimate, the Advertising Standards Authority found that the figure had a reasonable probability of being accurate]

It can be assumed that the overwhelming majority of the 100,000 whose lives have been spared are profoundly grateful that they were not conceived in a jurisdiction covered by the 1967 Abortion Act.

What possible right can the Parliament at Westminster have effectively to sentence to death so large a proportion of the next generation of unborn babies in Northern Ireland who would otherwise be born safely and just as alive and grateful for life as the 100,000 already spared?
The suggested new legislation would be a disaster of Herodian proportions - a government-sponsored project which took the lives of other people’s children. The modern difference is that the mothers would have a choice, but the solemn and tragic reality is that, for the babies to whom it applies, the outcome is the same - no rights, no life.

[3] The current abortion law in Northern Ireland is much less discriminatory against the disabled than it is in other parts of the UK. In England, Scotland and Wales, for instance, about 90% of pregnancies are terminated following a positive screening test for Down’s Syndrome. This is not so in Northern Ireland, where positive screening cannot legally result in termination.

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