We have been in existence since 1997 working to keep abortion not only illegal but unthinkable here in Northern Ireland. Over the course of the last two decades, we have witnessed overwhelming support for Northern Ireland’s legal protection for women and their unborn babies, which is sustained to this very day. Although there is an appetite for change to our life-saving laws amongst many British politicians at Westminster in the absence of a devolved government, this appetite is not shared here in Northern Ireland.

Frankly, the same British politicians relentlessly advocating for the scrapping of our pro-life laws, would be astounded by the lack of on-the-ground demand for abortion in Northern Ireland, if they were actually on the streets talking to the public like Precious Life are. We speak with thousands of people each year through our various campaigns, on the streets, and all over Northern Ireland in communities and schools, and we have witnessed first-hand the reality that the majority of people here reject abortion, and would much rather see both mother and baby cared for in a truly compassionate and humane way.

I will outline the various reasons why we, as an organisation, believe that introducing abortion to Northern Ireland would be a major ethical and human rights injustice and would seriously compromise the health and safety of women in Northern Ireland.

Executive Summary:

- From our experience as a prominent lobby group with 20 years of experience, there is little on the ground demand for abortion in Northern Ireland
- The humanity of the unborn baby, with the help of scientific advancement, is undeniable and as a progressive society, we have a responsibility to use this knowledge
- There is no human right to abortion, in any international treaty or legal instrument
- The introduction of abortion in NI would seriously impact upon the most vulnerable in our society
- Abortion, as evidence proves, has had seriously negative and disconcerting implications on women’s health throughout the world
Women and babies are safer without abortion, and should be offered compassionate, life-affirming care and alternatives, in keeping with the will of Northern Irish people and their elected representatives.

Firstly, when addressing abortion, it is imperative to first consider the humanity of the unborn baby. Each and every unborn baby (regardless of the circumstances of conception, ability or disability) is a human being and a person deserving of human rights, by virtue of his or her humanity.

At 16 days, the heart starts beating (British Heart Foundation) and by twelve weeks, a baby is fully formed with all of his or her bodily organs functioning and just needs time to grow. The sole purpose of the law in Northern Ireland is to protect the mother as well as her unborn child. Sections 58 and 59 of the Offences against the Person Act (1861) and Section 25 of the Criminal Justice Act (NI) 1945 together recognise that the unborn child, at any and every stage of development, is a human being – a person – deserving of protection under the law.

Each human life is a continuum that begins at conception and advances in stages until death. Science gives different names to these stages, including zygote, blastocyst, embryo, fetus, and infant, child, adolescent and adult. This does not change the scientific consensus that at all points of development each individual is a living member of the human species.

Secondly, it is important that the Women and Equalities Committee acknowledge that our maternal mortality rate in Northern Ireland is the lowest in the UK, and one of the lowest in in the entire world. Northern Ireland is one of the safest places for women globally, and one of the safest places to have a baby. This was proven through a landmark study carried out by various medical practitioners, which was published in the Journal of American Physicians and Surgeons (Summer 2013). Over 40 years of legalized abortion in Britain there has been a consistent pattern in which higher abortion rates have run parallel to higher incidence of stillbirths, premature births, low birth-weight neonates and cerebral palsy as sequelae of abortion. In contrast, both Irish jurisdictions consistently display lower rates of all morbidities and mortality associated with legalized abortion.
Furthermore, there is no such thing as a ‘human right to abortion.’ There is no treaty or convention acknowledging a supposed ‘right’ to abortion, yet the right to life of every person is widely recognised in international law. All human beings, as members of the human family, are entitled to recognition of their inherent dignity and to protection of their inalienable human rights. This is recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and other international instruments:

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights ‘[...] recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world’


The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. As indicated in the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, “the child, by reason of his physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection, before as well as after birth.”

The right to life of all members of the human family, whether born or unborn, with or without a disability, irrespective of the crime committed against his or her mother, is enshrined in international human rights law.

The findings of the CEDAW Committee have no binding authority on Northern Ireland. The Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW Committee) and other treaty monitoring bodies have directed governments to change their laws on abortion. These bodies have explicitly or implicitly interpreted the treaties to which they are subject as including a right to abortion.

Treaty monitoring bodies have no authority, either under the treaties that created them or under general international law, to interpret these treaties in ways that create new state obligations or that alter the substance of the treaties. Accordingly, any such body that interprets a treaty to include a right to abortion acts beyond its authority and contrary to its mandate. Such ultra vires acts do not create any legal obligations for states parties to the treaty, nor should states accept them as contributing to the formation of new customary international law.
Decades of legalised abortion globally have proven that abortion hurts women and significantly increases the risk of mental health problems. Research shows that abortion carries an increased risk of mental health problems including anxiety, depression, alcohol and drug dependence, self-harm and suicidal behaviour.

**The Fergusson Study:** Evidence from a 30-Year Longitudinal Study (2008).

**The Coleman Study:** An analysis of 22 studies published in the British Journal of Psychiatry in 2011 showed that women who had had an abortion experienced an 81% increased risk of mental health problems including anxiety, depression, alcohol and drug dependence and suicidal behaviour. Nearly 10% of the incidence of mental health problems was attributable to abortion.

This inquiry disregards the principles of democracy and the reality that Northern Ireland has already voted to retain our pro-life laws. It is totally unfair for another government – such as Westminster – to try to override the democratic process and force their own abortion culture on Northern Ireland. We are the most recent part of the UK to vote on abortion and in the spirit of democracy, this vote must be respected. As recently as 2016, our devolved government voted against any change to our life-saving laws – laws that safeguard mothers and unborn babies and have ensured that at least 100,000 people are alive today. An amendment to legalise the abortion of babies with life-limiting disabilities was defeated in Stormont in January 2016 by 59 votes to 40. The amendment to legalise the killing of babies conceived in rape or incest was defeated even more overwhelmingly, by 64 votes to 32.

Furthermore, In April 2015, it was revealed that over 99% of the responses to the then Justice Minister David Ford MLA’s consultation of changing the law to allow abortion in cases of “lethal foetal abnormality and sexual crime” opposed any change in the law. 25,140 of the 25,320 responses to the consultation opposed any change in the law. Northern Ireland rejects not only abortion on demand, but abortion in every case.

There is no on-the-ground demand for abortion here in Northern Ireland. Huge support for our pro-life laws has been proven through the overwhelming response to Precious Life’s petition campaigns in recent years.

On 28th November 2016, 300,000 pro-life petitions were presented at Stormont Parliament Buildings. These petitions, collected by Precious Life and
presented on behalf of the pro-life majority in Northern Ireland, served as a powerful reminder to the Northern Ireland Assembly that unborn children must continue to be protected by our laws.

In Northern Ireland, over 100,000 people are alive today because of our pro-life laws. By contrast, in Great Britain there have been almost 9 million abortions: one abortion every three minutes, 20 every hour and 600 every working day, with one in three pregnancies now ended by abortion. Britain now have abortion up to birth in the case of babies with disabilities – leading to 90 per cent of babies with Down’s syndrome being aborted – and of little girls merely because of their gender. We do not want this culture of death and eugenics in Northern Ireland.

Westminster’s attempts to push abortion onto Northern Ireland clearly undermine and endanger the peace process here. The spirit of the Good Friday agreement was all about respecting devolution, and was founded on the principles of full respect for and equality of all rights, and of freedom from discrimination for all people in Northern Ireland. Our unborn children must never be discriminated against. Their most fundamental right – the right to life – must always be respected and upheld.

Recommendations for Government:

- The law in Northern Ireland works as it stands, and fulfils its purpose – which in any civilised society, is to protect the human rights of every citizen. Our pro-life laws uphold the human dignity and fundamental rights of everyone, born and unborn. In keeping with the principles of devolution and Northern Irish democracy, our pro-life law must be upheld
- We need to see more positive and comprehensive education in schools which teaches pupils about the importance of sexual integrity
- Better funding for pregnancy support centres and services, to raise public awareness of life-affirming choices and to make these life-saving services more accessible for women in difficult or crisis pregnancies which would include financial, moral, emotional and practical support to help women through their pregnancies
- More funding and awareness for perinatal hospice care, so that families of babies with life-limiting conditions can get the realistic, compassionate
and practical support and help so badly needed when faced with a heart-breaking diagnosis.

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