I am writing to make a submission to the Women and Equalities Committee 'Abortion in Northern Ireland' Inquiry. I wish to make the following points.

1. An unborn baby 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, 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.

2. Our maternal mortality rate in Northern Ireland is the lowest in the UK, and one of the lowest 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.

3. Hard cases make bad law.
Every person - born and preborn - deserves to be protected regardless of race, gender, disability, circumstances of conception or predicted lifespan. The value of a human life cannot be ranked based on the circumstances of conception. It is either a human being or it is not. If an unborn baby is not a human being - then no justification for abortion is necessary and it would be legalised up to birth worldwide and no debate would be needed. However, if an unborn baby is a human being then no justification for abortion is adequate. **Fatal Foetal Abnormality** is not a medical term and it is incredibly offensive to families with babies who have life-limiting conditions. Medical predictions are not always accurate or even correct. These babies with life-limiting conditions are just as worthy of protection, love and life as you and I. Whether a person lives for 1 minute, 1 day, 1 month, 1 year, 1 decade, 1 century - they are compatible with life and love.

Rape is a disgusting, inhumane violation of a woman. However, abortion is further physical, emotional and psychological trauma, pain and damage. Women who have been raped need emotional support and medical
care. Abortion is more violence following a violent act. Killing their baby will not help them or "un-rape" them. Punish the rapist - not the innocent third party, the preborn baby.

We cannot expect the violence of abortion to somehow be a path of healing for the violence and trauma that woman already endured. We need to think better and differently about victims of violence.

Rebecca Kiessling, an American lawyer, who is the founder of pro-life group "Save the 1", was conceived in rape. She says, "Did I deserve the death penalty for the crimes of my biological father?" She has also stated, "My crime was being conceived through rape. So next time you hear people talking about "exceptions" to abortion for rape, think of me. My name is Rebecca. I am that exception."

Valerie Gatto, Miss Pennsylvania 2014, was also conceived in rape. She says, "My Mom always told me I was her light. The way I look at it, from that moment of conception, I was the light associated with the darkness."

Between 85%-90% of women in the rape crisis centre in Dublin, who become pregnant, do not even seek or want an abortion. They need care, love and practical support. These very rare, difficult cases are also utilised by those who advocate abortion in order to change to abortion non a much wider scale. Hard cases make bad law. Every life deserves to be protected and women deserve holistic care and support. A person from conception - no exception!

Denise Mountenay, the Founder of Canada Silent No More and Together for Life Ministries, has direct experience with rape, teen pregnancy and abortion. Denise was raped when she was just 13 and she has had 3 abortions, which she deeply regrets, “Legal abortion is damaging women, our mental health our reproductive health as well as causing breast cancer.”

4. There is no 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.

5. CEDAW Committee:
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.

6. 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 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.

7. This inquiry disregards the principles of democracy and the reality that Northern Ireland has voted on this issue. 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.

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.

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.

8. 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.

9. 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.

10. Westminster’s attempts to push abortion onto Northern Ireland clearly undermines 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.

In conclusion, I urge the Committee to respect the right of the people of Northern Ireland, through their elected representatives to decide what the law on abortion should be. The law in Northern Ireland protects life, especially the lives of the disabled. I do not want a change on abortion law to be imposed on Northern Ireland.

December 2018