1) DEVOLUTION
At the outset I want to say to every member of the Committee, in the strongest possible manner, that the law and policy on Abortion, as a devolved matter, is something which is for politicians in Northern Ireland to frame and not those at Westminster. This brought into an even sharper focus since my researches show that no member of the Women and Equalities Committee has been elected to represent a seat in the Province. Dealing as it does with human life, Abortion is a highly sensitive and intensely emotive issue at a most sensitive time in Northern Ireland- the Committee’s intervention is therefore both constitutionally inappropriate and highly counter-productive! For many in Northern Ireland this move by Westminster politicians sets a worrying precedent which members of the Scottish and Welsh devolved Assemblies should be especially aware of. The above are not just the personal views of my wife and I but widely shared across the community and political divide in Northern Ireland. This is emphasised very strongly by a recent Opinion Poll undertaken by the highly respected market research firm ComRes which revealed that nearly two-thirds (64%) of Northern Ireland people believe that Abortion is a matter for the Province’s elected representatives to decide. The same poll shows this was the view of 66% of women and 70% of 18-34 year olds.

2) DISTINCTIVE LAW AND CULTURE
We in Northern Ireland are very aware that law most definitely shapes culture. This is a statement of FACT not opinion. Independently verified research (through the ASA) showed that on a very conservative basis some 100,000 individuals (that is 1 in every 18 people in the Province) are alive today who would not otherwise had we in Northern Ireland adopted the 1967 Abortion Act. What foresight our local politicians had 50 years ago! This means that in my own Mid and East Antrim Council area around 8,000 are alive today because of our good, life-affirming legislation. Given that some of these who are alive today because of our law have had families, that 100,000 figure is likely to be higher! Sadly, the counter claims of some politicians and “so-called human rights organisations” that the law does not stop abortions is without any empirical foundation. A tragic consequence of your 1967 Act in GB is the almost total lack of protection for individuals who have a disability. For on the mainland we are only too well aware that unborn children can and are aborted up to term if a disability is identified in utero. This does not happen in Northern Ireland and makes a major and significant difference. This is clearly exemplified by the fact that in GB in 2016 some 90% of those identified in utero with Down’s Syndrome were aborted whereas in stark contrast 90% of those children in Northern Ireland were born. Overall it is abundantly clear that "our wee Province" is the safest place in these islands to be diagnosed with a disability before birth. The compassionate heart of a civilised nation is surely best shown by how it treats the most vulnerable and we in Northern Ireland proudly and unashamedly celebrate the fact we do not discriminate against the disabled in the womb.

3) HUMAN RIGHTS & EQUALITY
My wife and I closely followed the recent Supreme Court case with much interest and concern. We noted the outcome and in particular that a number of the Supreme Court Justices indicated that they think that on only two narrow points - life limiting conditions and sexual crime - the law on abortion in Northern Ireland is incompatible with Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights. However, we also noted these comments were non-binding! That said, even if a future court were to make a binding ruling on these matters, the cases in question only engage a very tiny number of abortion cases in practice for we understand from published Government statistics that under 2% of recorded abortions in England and Wales were granted on these grounds. Put another way for some 98% of births Northern Ireland are fully compatible with Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights.
In the various media we have repeatedly seen and heard some local and national politicians and "so-called human rights organisations" frequently and mischievously argue that the UN says that Northern Ireland’s abortion laws are not human rights compliant and that therefore Northern Ireland should decriminalise abortion. The real truth, however, is that this does not refer to the view of the United Nations as a body. It merely refers only to a report issued by one unelected committee, the Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). These politicians and lobbying groups lead the public to believe that the UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which defines the remit of the CEDAW Committee, sets out a right to abortion and which Northern Ireland is failing to deliver. In truth, however, at no point does this Convention mention abortion! We wonder why this is something pro-abortion groups never admit? Further, Prof Mark Hill QC, has highlighted that as a non-judicial body, CEDAW has no legal standing to read such a right into the Convention, much as some of its members may wish to do so.

In reading the Supreme Court’s judgement Members of the United Kingdom Supreme Court make it abundantly clear that the views of bodies such as the CEDAW Committee are only of marginal relevance. In particular my wife and I noted what Lord Wilson said, “the authority of their recommendations is slight.” Consequently, we want to alert Women’s and Equalities Committee to the real danger that it accepts the lie that women can only be equal when they have an absolute right to abortion in any circumstance for any reason. This lie pitches a woman against her unborn child and measures their freedom, equality and progress by their ability to end the life of their own child. This is a most dangerous and destructive way to view women and humanity more widely. Many, many women, men and children see a much, much better and more human way ahead which really and deeply values the life, health and dignity of both mother and unborn child as far as possible.

4) PERSONAL STORIES
As parents and grandparents we deeply value and cherish our children and grandchildren. New life is something as a society we need to value most deeply. That our culture does not seem to value the unborn was clearly portrayed in last year’s BBC programme “Abortion on Trial”. What a profoundly misleading title! It was much more an ad promoting and pushing abortion. There was no reflection on the 9 million aborted unborn British children over the past 50 years and the damage done to women and wider society. Is this a new taboo? In our wider family circle we have witnessed the juddering physical and mental consequences across the generations which abortion can bring. Something glossed over, even totally ignored by pro-abortion politicians and lobby groups. Apart from the profound moral and ethical consequences of liberal, even decriminalised abortion, there are quite pragmatic reasons why we and we believe the Committee should support the reality that both lives matter, the mother and the child. Listening to the daily news and current affairs broadcasts it is evidently clear that we can ill afford to destroy the talent of future generations (in both Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK) – the entrepreneurs we need to generate new businesses and jobs – scientists and inventors who will make great discoveries – politicians and statesmen with vision and humility who can lead – talented artists, writers and musicians who will add those extra enriching dimensions to life – talented teachers and educators who will enable each new generation to reach its full potential – together they can bring hope, joy, a good and peaceful future to our Province and nation. Without them we will in so many dimensions be an infinitely poorer, depleted and diminished society.

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