Written submission from Frank Reynolds (ANI0609)

1) DEVOLUTION
Submission to The House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee: Abortion in Northern Ireland

Dear Committee members,

I am concerned that at a time when the Stormont Assembly is suspended, the House of Commons should be seeking to bring pressure to bear on Northern Ireland to introduce the right to Abortion. Further, as no Northern Ireland MP sits on the Committee, this is the wrong method and the wrong time to bring pressure for change. It is only appropriate that the Stormont Assembly should debate this issue - that is how I understand an issue being a devolved matter - or are all the devolved Assemblies to now expect Westminster to involve itself in locally devolved matters?

2) DISTINCTIVE LAW AND CULTURE

It is with real concern that the implications of Abortion 'reform' on individuals with disabilities must be considered. The unethical pursuit of 'equality' in this matter clearly will have the consequence of the life of many children in the womb who have disabilities being aborted. Figures for England, Scotland and Wales covering 2016 show that 90% of children identified in utero as having Down’s Syndrome were aborted (in Northern Ireland, the equivalent statistics showed that 90% of such children lived). This is a chilling prospect for our population who have disabilities in our equality-driven society - but where is the equality for those with a disability.

Iceland has aggressively pursued a policy to eradicate Down’s Syndrome. In terms of a health policy, one can use this language to talk about eradicating malaria or some disease - but here we are talking about eradicating defenceless children when they are most vulnerable.

Hulda Hjartardottir, head of the Prenatal Diagnosis Unit at Landspitali University Hospital, recently told CBS, “We don’t look at abortion as a murder. We look at it as a thing that we ended.” (Url: https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/iceland-downs-syndrome-no-children-born-first-country-world-screening-a7895996.html)

"A thing"? This is truly a chilling comment. The child in the womb is de facto a human being. We de-humanize ourselves by making laws built on such language.

The moral confusion over such issues is staggering. If a young Down’s Syndrome adult excels in the Olympics or some sporting endeavour, we gushingly salute their achievement, they will be all over the media - and rightly so. Yet we pass legislation which removes the right of such children to be born on a muddled basis of personal choice.

Oddly and disturbingly, liberalising abortion is an example of the law of survival, of the strong eliminating the weak, the survival of the fittest - it is the law of the jungle dressed up in false notions of equality and compassion. What does that do to us as a society? Where is our moral compass? It degrades us as human beings, it removes our claims to compassion and raised the question of what will be the next age-group to be targeted, the elderly, the economically unproductive?

3) HUMAN RIGHTS & EQUALITY

The issue of Human Rights is central. However, the UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women does not mention Abortion but does however emphasise the "that the interest of the children is primordial in all cases." (Article 5). Note that even in the rational science of Biology, the word "primordial" refers to a cell in the earliest stage of development" - in other words, a child from the moment of conception. The issue of abortion is not a question of a civil
right which a government can choose to remove, it is a matter of a basic Human Right, the Right to Life.
We live in a society which has very mixed standards. We can (and should) go to considerable expense to protect endangered species of animals; e.g. protecting nesting sites so that young may be conceived, hatched and reared. Yet we will seriously consider legal measures to make the ending of a child’s life a matter of routine health care. This is not the way of Human Rights, nor is it humane or compassionate. How can it be compassionate to end a life just as it is beginning? The 100,000 people who are alive today because Northern Ireland does not have a UK style abortion service are all around us, they are serving in our hospitals, teaching in our schools, running businesses, serving us in restaurants, designing and building our infrastructure and homes, working as Church ministers, serving in our Police & emergency services, being good neighbours….I probably meet some of them, or their children, every day. The current law in Northern Ireland has saved lives - can you imagine another measure which is guaranteed to save the lives of children in such numbers in such a small jurisdiction?
The pro-choice lobby argue that there is a right to choose, it is your life, you can choose, you have the right to choose what your life will look like. However, there are two lives involved (perhaps more) and one of them does not have a choice, the child’s choice to have life and an opportunity to grow and develop are removed.
There exists the argument that it is best to abort a child to prevent it suffering, yet who has a right to decide this for another human being? Is that compassion? Some of the happiest and most loving human beings I have known have Down's Syndrome and some of the happiest families I know have a child with a disability. Children with a disability have the right to live to achieve happiness and fulfilment. Who are we to pronounce a death sentence on them?

4) PERSONAL STORIES

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