Written submission from Norma (ANI0677)

1) DEVOLUTION
This is a devolved issue to be decided by NI politicians who are answerable to the electorate here. Although, sadly, the NI Assembly is temporarily suspended, nonetheless it would be highly inappropriate for other bodies to interfere in this subject at such a sensitive time for NI. Such interference could set a worrying precedent for other devolved assemblies. I would also note that such interference is highly selective, in that there is nothing like the same interest being taken in other areas of NI life.
In addition, recent poll of NI adults showed that 64% (66% of women and 70% of 18-34 year-olds) believe that our own elected representatives should decide this issue.

2) DISTINCTIVE LAW AND CULTURE
The NI law on abortion has been proved to save lives. Recently, the Advertising Standards Authority investigated and upheld a 2017 research finding by Both Lives Matter that 100,000 people are alive today in NI who would not otherwise have been if NI had followed the rest of the UK in adopting the 1967 Abortion Act. The law does make a difference.

In particular, the NI law prevents unjustified discrimination against unborn babies with disability - unlike the rest of the UK where such children can be aborted up to birth.

2016 saw 90% of Down Syndrome babies aborted in the rest of the UK while in NI 90% of these babies were born.

‘NI is the safest place in the UK to be diagnosed with a disability before birth’ (Lord Shinkwin 2018)

3) HUMAN RIGHTS & EQUALITY
The argument that NI’s abortion laws are not human rights-compliant does not represent the United Nations as a body, but was made in a report issued by one unelected group - the Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). In fact at no point does the UN Convention mention abortion. In fact the CEDAW has no legal standing to read such a right into the Convention (Prof Mark Hill QC)

The danger of these arguments is that they appear to pitch the mother against her own unborn child - and has frightening consequences for the future of humanity itself.

4) PERSONAL STORIES
I was a student midwife in Scotland in 1968 when the first implications of the new Abortion Act began to make themselves felt. I saw dreadful abuses of the then 12-week rule as a result of collusion between some pregnant mothers and their obstetrician/gynaecologist (O/G)and between the O/G and colleagues from psychiatry whose role it was to declare the mother mentally unfit to cope with the ‘strain’ of the pregnancy.

Since then, in many counselling sessions, I have seen the private pain of women (often some years after the event) who are condemned to living with a lifetime of remorse and grief as a result of having destroyed their own unborn child - when in so many cases, they might have acted differently had they received the appropriate counselling and support.

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