



“Westminster has imposed an unjust law. Christians, and all people of good will, can never ignore the fact that unborn children are human beings worthy of protection” – Northern Catholic Bishops

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Statement by the Northern Catholic Bishops on the direction of the Secretary of State to introduce abortion services to Northern Ireland

The decision last week by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Brandon Lewis MP, to direct the NI Executive and Department of Health to make abortion services available in Northern Ireland by 21 March 2022, is gravely disquieting. It is the latest in a line of decisions by the current Westminster Government which we believe threaten the fragile balance of relationships at the heart of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement.

Sadly, some of our local political parties seem content to welcome this unilateral move by Westminster on an issue which is of fundamental importance to local voters, while rightly challenging such unilateral impositions on other issues.

With many others, from a wide range of moral, philosophical and religious backgrounds, we have consistently held that the right to life of every person, irrespective of stage of development or ability, is the prior and essential right of all other human rights. Our shared search for peace is driven in no small part by our collective rejection of the brutality and demeaning of human dignity that occurs when the right to life is diminished in any way. Thankfully, we live in an age when sensitivity to the preciousness and fragility of all life on our planet, even in its most microscopic forms, is better understood and appreciated. The failure to extend this sensitivity and care to our own fellow human beings in the womb, as well as to mothers in pregnancy will, we believe, one day be seen as a grave moral blindness on the part of this generation and a profound dereliction of our responsibility to uphold the most basic human right of all - the right to life.

In unilaterally imposing this direction on the local Northern Ireland Assembly to provide abortion services, it is as if the Westminster Government, and those local parties who have supported them, believe the answer to the issue of providing compassionate care for a woman and her unborn child in pregnancy can be framed simply and exclusively as a “healthcare issue”. Absent from the discussion however are the thousands of unborn children, who have no legal protection and whose humanity is excluded from the political equation. It is for this reason that the argument for the protection of all human life can never be abandoned or referred to human rights experts alone. Westminster has imposed an unjust law. Christians, and all people of good will, can never stand silently by and fail to raise their voices at any attempt to ignore completely the fact that unborn children are human beings worthy of protection.

As our society prepares in coming months to engage in the ultimate expression of democratic participation - the election to our local Assembly - we encourage all Catholics, and those who share our view on the inviolability of all human life, to reflect carefully on the issues raised by this succession of unilateral impositions by the Westminster Government. We encourage everyone who believes in the equal right to life and compassionate care for a mother and her unborn child to ask local candidates and political parties to explain their position on these interventions and on this most fundamental of all issues.