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28th January 2021

Dear Sir/ Madam,

NI Bill of Rights – Consultation Submission

We welcome the opportunity to make our submission on this important matter. We trust that responses received will be treated with respect they deserve. We make this point at the outset since we have recently experienced a previous consultation, in which the overwhelming views of a huge number of respondents were totally ignored by the Northern Ireland Office, as they seemingly did not fit in with a course of action which from all accounts they had already been predetermined.

We suggest that such a Bill not only needs to cover freedoms, rights, and protections but also **Responsibilities**. Failure to include responsibilities will in our view produce a lopsided piece of legislation. Rights and responsibilities cannot be separated. The Bill's basis cannot be focused on autonomy and rampant individualism. The Bill must spell out the **values, attitudes and beliefs** on which it is based. It must have widespread community support and endorsement. **Definitions** must be clear and not fudged. We strongly suggest that the Bill must focus on enduring values e.g., things that are true, right, honourable, pure, lovely and admirable not the latest sociological or psychological fad or invention.

It is unclear to us the degree to which the Bill is:

- aspirational in nature,
- what additional resources, if any, are available for implementation,
- what timescales are envisaged,
- Likewise, what mechanisms will be in place to deal with any **hierarchy of rights** since the potential for conflicting rights is surely high?

In our view not everyone in NI enjoys the same basic human rights. The most fundamental right from which all else flows must surely be the **Right to Life**. Yet the most vulnerable in our society in Northern Ireland, the unborn child who is a human being, a person, has been 'accorded' no right to life. The evidence is clear and unambiguous every abortion ends a human life, and many women are harmed. Abortion dehumanises the baby, as an 'unwanted commodity' that is flushed away and for the mother there is denial of or minimising of the impact of abortion on her mental and physical health.

So, in our view the **Right to Life must be foundational to the Bill**. We emphasise this because tragically we have been astounded and horrified that human rights bodies and organisations in Northern Ireland most conveniently state that they "*don't take a position on when human life begins*". They unashamedly articulate a 'pro-abortion' stance under a so-called 'pro-choice' label. Yet they have never acted to enable women with crisis pregnancies to actually have real choice. We may be mistaken but to many people their agenda clearly appears to be full decriminalisation of abortion, ideally with no or few restrictions to access, right up to birth.

It is also evident that in practice **abortion is highly discriminatory** against:

- persons with life limiting conditions,
- persons with disabilities,
- people with Down's Syndrome (eugenicide),
- girls (sex-selective or gendercide),
- and ethnic minorities.

The right to life of these groups surely deserves protection.

In the past we have also asked these same human rights bodies and organisations about their stance/ policy regarding **infanticide and euthanasia**. We still await clear, unambiguous responses. We are most puzzled at the delay.

Further, this week it must be noted that three senior United Nations officials, Gerard Quinn (Rapporteur on the Rights of the disabled); Olivier De Schutter, rapporteur on

extreme poverty and human rights; and Claudia Mahler, an expert on Human Rights for the Elderly, highlighted their grave concerns that legalised euthanasia and assisted suicide would institutionalise and authorise ableism, and directly violate Article 10 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which requires States to ensure that persons with disabilities can effectively enjoy their inherent right to life on an *equal* basis with others. **Abortion equally institutionalises and authorises ableism.**

In January 2021 we have become aware that already in Northern Ireland a number of babies have been born live after an abortion and left to die. Leaving some midwives distraught. So, the questions we have asked are not academic. In our view the extreme abortion regime imposed on Northern Ireland from April 2020 cannot be reconciled with any Bill of Rights worthy to bear such a title.

In our view the **accessibility and privacy of abortion services** should never come before the safety of the woman and her child. If these aspects are equated or prioritised before safety, it contributes to an atmosphere that devalues human life. A Bill of Rights worth its salt must result in real funding and support for life enabling and affirming choices. It must fundamentally build towards the active creation of society where the lives, and health of every woman and every unborn child are valued, enabled and affirmed. We firmly believe that every woman in Northern Ireland surely deserves to be able to choose life for her child; life cannot not just for the privileged, the planned and the perfect. What a positive message of hope and a future could come from Northern Ireland if our Bill of Rights achieved that.

Areas which should be included:

Right of conscience – people should be not to be force or coerced into particular actions which are against their conscience or beliefs is very important especially e.g., within the NHS. Anyone, whether they might be directly or indirectly involved, should have the right to fully exercise their conscience without fear of any adverse effects or criticism on their employment status and career.

Right of Belief and free speech – people should have the right to believe, change their belief and to express it in the public square. Expression of faith and belief must be protected from aggressive secular atheism which paradoxically is a ‘faith’ itself. Liberalism says it is tolerant but in practice but it only applies toleration to itself, it is highly intolerant to any other perspective, belief or worldview. The practices of “*no platforming*” etc. should be surely unacceptable in any Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland.

Right to Family Life – this issue has been highlighted most recently in our nearest neighbour the Republic of Ireland with the Report on Mother and Baby Units. It links closely with the right to life.

We trust what we have tried to write as constructively as possible in our submission is helpful and of use.

Yours Faithfully,

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To be added to previous uploaded submission.

Additional comments for NI Bill of Rights Consultation

Q.1 We disagree

We previously set out in detail our significant concerns about the lack of respect for the rights of the unborn child. This must be the foundational element of the Bill.

From experience we have serious concerns that **religious liberty rights** in NI are not afforded the same priority as some other rights. This is unacceptable. We passionately believe that people must be able to freely express their deeply held religious beliefs in public. They must also be able to run their businesses in accordance with their deeply held religious beliefs. People should also be able to request adjustments at their work to be able to follow religious practices without fear of being discriminated in their workplace.

Q. 2 Other – Pre-birth rights

Disability – There is clear need to protect people with disabilities, including the unborn person with disabilities from disability to combat the increasing feature of ableism in our society.

Gender – There is considerable evidence of the need to protect the unborn girl child from sex-selective abortions (gendercide). NI does not have any prohibition on this (unlike the rest of GB where such is not a ground for an abortion or the IOM where it is an offence). This has been repeatedly pointed out to the NI SOS and the NIO, but they have refused to act.

Pregnancy & Maternity – It is evident that women do need protection and support during pregnancy with access to generous maternity pay/allowance regardless of the nature of their employment.

Religion or Belief – In our 1st submission we referred that the right to freedom of religion or belief in the Bill is essential. Protection should at least be in line with international standards. Protections in our view must be sufficiently broad to include

not only practicing religious beliefs at home, behind closed door, but also in educational settings and in the public square. For us this must include being able to run your business in accordance with your religious beliefs.

Reasonable Accommodation – On occasions we have seen people face real and significant challenges in combining work duties with their religious beliefs. This is completely unacceptable - in our view they should be able to do both rather than choose between them. We would strongly recommend that the Bill introduce a mechanism which ensures better protections of the right to freedom of religion or belief. That is a formal mechanism of reasonable accommodation.

Freedom of Expression – We covered this to some extent in our first submission on the Bill. We believe that the right of freedom of expression must enable people to express their deeply held religious beliefs freely and without fear. People should not be compelled to promote causes which are contrary to their deeply held religious beliefs.

Q. 3

Human Dignity – This must be a cornerstone, the central plank, the fundamental value underpinning any Bill of Rights. We firmly believe that human dignity must be given to, from the unborn child in its mother's womb to the oldest person in Northern Ireland society,

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2 February 2021