



“A Truly Compassionate Society Values All Life”

Statement from

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on the forthcoming referendum

In a few weeks time, the people of Ireland must make a decision that will have a profound impact on the kind of society we will be in the future. We will be asked to decide on whether to retain the 8th amendment in our Constitution by voting ‘No’ or to remove it by voting ‘Yes’. I wish to share with you my conviction about why it is essential to vote “No” if we are to build a truly compassionate society that values all life.

The choice before us has become even starker in the light of the recent judgment of the Supreme Court which stated that the only legal protection the unborn child has at present is the 8th amendment. If this is removed the unborn child up to birth becomes a non-person in Irish law. Do we want to say that the child in the womb has no rights whatsoever in our Constitution? This, I am sure, every mother would find impossible to believe from her experience of her child moving in the womb as he or she grows and develops. The Supreme Court judgment means that the child in the womb would have no constitutional right to treatment or support.

Despite suggestions to the contrary, the Church asks that all necessary medical treatment be given to a mother in pregnancy even if this were to result in the unintended death of the child. Highly respected medical and legal experts have made it clear that under the present law the best standards of care are available to mothers in a crisis pregnancy. All involved in caring for the pregnant mother in Ireland have to take pride in the fact that Ireland is one of the safest countries in which to be pregnant.

A compassionate society will do all in its power to support and love the mother and baby. The 8th amendment is a declaration of equality and respect for human life. It represents, at the very foundation and substructure of our laws, a conviction that all human life has to be cherished. Are we as a society to say to women experiencing a crisis in their pregnancy that the solution to their concern is to be found in abortion? Does this show compassion and care for women? The solution to a crisis pregnancy should be found in addressing the crisis, not in terminating the life of an innocent child. Abortion is a brutal act. There is no semblance of compassion involved in ending the life of the child in the womb. It is difficult to imagine how such an action could be compatible with the Catholic faith in any way.

The recent Supreme Court judgment means that, were the 8th amendment to be removed from the Constitution, the current government will legislate for unlimited abortion on demand up to 12 weeks, for unlimited abortion up to 24 weeks on the grounds of mental health, and for unlimited abortion up to birth in cases of life-limiting conditions. This prospect can only be described as horrifying. The appalling statistics of abortion rates in other countries should fill us with the dread of similar rates becoming normalised here. Are we to ignore the images, which technology makes available to us, of a child at 12 weeks who has a beating heart, a brain, eyes and ears, limbs, who is yawning, sucking the thumb, and who is clearly saying to us, "I want to live!"? To deprive the child of the right to life would be the gravest of injustices and by removing the 8th amendment we are doing just that.

It remains my hope that we can hand on to future generations a vision for society that is truly inclusive, which enshrines in its laws the equal right of every person to life, and which is capable of offering compassion and care to those in crisis. Our Constitution acknowledges that the right to life precedes all our laws, and our common humanity tells us that this is how it should be. The power to decide who lives and who dies should not belong to the individual. This can never be the foundation for a society that seeks to put compassion and care at its heart. Saving the 8th means that we do not have to choose between two competing rights. To choose life is to choose both.