

Open letter to MPs and Peers

Abortion legislation is undemocratic, discriminatory and detrimental to society

Monday 15 June

On behalf of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, the largest protestant denomination in Northern Ireland, I am appealing to members of the House of Commons and House of Lords to vote against the Abortion (Northern Ireland) No. 2 Regulations 2020 later this week.

The decision to impose draft regulations was made in a vote last July during which 100% of MPs elected by the people of Northern Ireland, who were present, voted against the change. In that moment we were disenfranchised on a matter of key importance. This was made worse by the fact that some MPs suggested that there was a human right imperative for doing so relating to the CEDAW Convention. The CEDAW Convention, an unelected and non-judicial UN Committee, does not even mention abortion and has no standing to 'read in' a right to abortion in UK legislation.

Northern Ireland was further disrespected by the fact that in the resulting consultation 79% of submissions rejected the Government's proposals - views which have been ignored. Moreover, the Government compounded the difficulty by not giving Parliament the opportunity to repeal Section 9 of the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc.) Act 2020, once the Northern Ireland Assembly had been restored. This would have returned responsibility for developing a new abortion law to the devolved institutions. Instead it proceeded to develop Regulations that are more permissive than those required by the legislation, which even pave the way for abortion on request based on gender selection.

On Tuesday 2 June the Northern Ireland Assembly did have its say when a cross-party majority voted to "reject the imposition of abortion legislation which extends to all non-fatal disabilities, including Down's syndrome". Indeed, in two separate votes a total of 75 out of 90 MLAs made it clear that they do not support abortion on the basis of non-fatal disability. During that debate MLAs highlighted the important work of disability campaigner Heidi Crowter and her message that allowing abortion up to birth for disabilities is not only discriminatory, but against the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities own recommendations. In responding through a BBC interview the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland refused to respect the vote, invoking once again the mistakenly interpreted international legal imperative to be 'CEDAW compliant'.

As Christians we not only believe that people are precious because they are made in the image of God. We also believe in respecting each other. In the United Kingdom that means its different constituent parts respecting each other and affording each other proper constitutional due process, something that has been entirely absent in the development of this legislation.

On behalf of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland I urge all parliamentarians to vote against these regulations which are undemocratic, discriminatory, and detrimental to the flourishing of all in society.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Daniel Kane', written over a horizontal line.

Rev Daniel Kane

Convener, Council for Public Affairs
Presbyterian Church in Ireland