



News release for immediate release 30/03/17

## **Ireland's over-medicalised system of maternity care criticised by Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe**

Midwives for Choice welcomes today's findings from the Council of Europe. Reporting on his visit to Ireland last November, the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe noted Ireland's system of maternity care as one that provides "an over-medicalised model of childbirth". Welcoming the Commissioner's concerns, Philomena Canning, chairperson of Midwives for Choice, said: "This is the second time Ireland's industrialised system of maternity care has been criticised by an international body. We strongly support the international calls for maternity care that respects the needs and choices of individual women."

During Ireland's human rights examination in February this year in Geneva, the UN Women's Committee, CEDAW, called on the government to ensure that women can access maternity services that do not use artificial methods to accelerate labour and that respect the normal birth process, describing Ireland's system of maternity care as one that transformed the most important experience of a lifetime for women and their partners into a production-line process.

In his report, the Commissioner for Human Rights stressed that pregnant women and adolescent girls are entitled to receive care that is respectful of their human rights, dignity and autonomy. Expressing concern about the consequences for women in childbirth of protecting the right to life of the unborn on an equal basis with the right to life of the pregnant woman, the Commissioner highlighted the "common practice by hospitals of invoking the Eighth Amendment – with threat of, or actual, court order – to force women to comply with medical decision-making about their care and treatment with which they do not agree".

Says Ms Canning: "Bodily integrity is a legal, constitutional and human right in Ireland that is flouted on a daily basis in our labour wards. The language of 'medical necessity' to protect the baby, backed up by the Eighth Amendment, cloaks the denial of women's fundamental rights in childbirth, as the evidence on their subjection to involuntary medical intervention and invasive procedures shows.

"We fully endorse the Commissioner's concerns about the negative impact of the Eighth Amendment on the human rights of all women throughout pregnancy and childbirth, and we share his hope that this legislation will soon be repealed."

-ends-

Further information: Ciara Considine, Communications Officer, Midwives for Choice, 087 6294969 or [mfc@midwivesforchoice.ie](mailto:mfc@midwivesforchoice.ie)

**Notes for editors:**

See Report of Commissioner for Human Rights of Council of Europe; available at:

<https://wcd.coe.int/com.instranet.InstraServlet?command=com.instranet.CmdBlobGet&InstranetImage=2965978&SecMode=1&DocId=2399932&Usage=2>

80. Amnesty International reports that state and religious institutions continue to subject women and girls to strict and punitive social controls around their sexuality, producing a strong sense of stigma about abortion in Ireland. Several stakeholders have informed the Commissioner that current practice seems to give precedence to foetal life over the potential risks to the woman's life and health. There have been allegations of a "common practice by hospitals of invoking the Eighth Amendment - with threat of, or actual, court order - to force women to comply with medical decision - making about their care and treatment with which they do not agree" (Midwives for Choice, Submission to CEDAW, January 2017).

See Report of CEDAW; available at:

[http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2fC%2fIRL%2fCO%2f6-7&Lang=en](http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2fC%2fIRL%2fCO%2f6-7&Lang=en)

44. The Committee is concerned at information that the State party has a policy of having 3 births per 24 hours for every bed in maternity wards, which does not respect the normal birth process. The Committee is particularly concerned that child delivery is highly medicalised and dependent on the use of artificial methods to accelerate the process such that women are made to deliver babies within 8 hours of hospitalization due to lack of resources in hospitals.

45. The Committee recommends that the State party revise its policy on medicalisation of child delivery and the use of maternity wards to ensure that women can have access to maternity and delivery services without time pressure or being exposed to artificial methods of accelerating births; and provide information in the next periodic report on the strategic plan aimed at launching a widely supported maternity health-care policy and programme respecting the birth process.

Notes on MfC

Midwives for Choice is a voluntary Irish organisation which advocates for an Irish society and a world where the rights of all women and girls to be safe and healthy before, during and after childbirth are upheld. This is achieved by ensuring they can make informed choices in their sexual and reproductive lives, and have full access to high quality information, education and health services

regarding sex, sexuality, contraception, safe abortion, sexually transmitted infections, pregnancy, childbirth and the postnatal period.

[midwivesforchoice.ie](http://midwivesforchoice.ie)

@midwives4choice

Facebook.com/midwives4choice

For media queries contact Ciara Considine 087 6294969 or [mfc@midwivesforchoice.ie](mailto:mfc@midwivesforchoice.ie)