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20 years on X case to finally be legislated

A step so small as to be almost invisible

Andrew Flood

December 19, 2012

This afternoon the government had finally confirmed that it is to legislate for abortion access under the conditions of the X-case. While we can welcome the failure of the anti-choice movement to stop this announcement, despite frantically spending a quarter of a million dollars euro in ten days, this is so little so late that it is almost meaningless. Perhaps a thousand women a year are already providing a very much more comprehensive abortion access for themselves through the use of pills ordered off the internet while 4,000 plus fly to other countries. Abortion access under the very limited conditions of the X-case will mean nothing to almost all of these women.

We pledge to continue our struggle for abortion access in Ireland at the women's request as part of a free medical service accessible to all. Our role is to make that a reality not simply through the demand for legislation or referendum but by making the anti-women ban on abortion unworkable — as so many

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women already do when they order abortion pills off internet services like Women on Web.

We agree with other pro-choice groups that today's announcement is a significant but tiny step forward. We reproduce that statement below.

Joint Statement: Pro-choice groups welcome government announcement and call for referendum

Speaking following the government announcement today that it intends to bring forward legislation and regulations on abortion, a broad range of pro-choice groups welcomed the call but said that the government must give commitments on the dates by which this will happen. The groups, which include Irish Choice Network, Choice Ireland, Action on X, Galway Pro-Choice, Cork Women's Right to Choose and Doctors for Choice said that furthermore this legislation should only be considered a first step towards liberalising abortion laws in Ireland which must include holding a referendum to repeal the 8th Amendment to the Constitution.

Action on X spokesperson Sinéad Kennedy said;

"We very much welcome this announcement today that a legal framework for abortion in cases of a risk to the life of a pregnant woman will be introduced, including that of suicide. However we are concerned that there is no timeframe or implementation plan included with it. The Expert Group was originally created to delay matters and the government should not be allowed to drag their feet on the issue. This should be the first item of business on the Dáil schedule once they return after Christmas. It has been delayed twenty years already.

"Within the legislation that is produced, there must also be no curtailment of a woman's right to

access abortion on the ground that she is suicidal. We are aware that there are moves from some TDs to have this rolled back, however this is a constitutional right confirmed by the Supreme Court decision in the X Case and the European Court of Human Rights judgment in the ABC case. It must be delivered on."

Further commenting, Choice Ireland spokesperson Stephanie Lord said;

"The government announcement that it will introduce legislation for X is to be welcomed, however it is now time for the government to acknowledge the reality of abortion in Ireland. The next step should be the introduction of a referendum bill that will repeal the 8th amendment. It is inhumane that this has not happened before now. There are 4,500 women that travel overseas for abortion services every year, and many more that order pills online to induce abortions at home. Women have a right to make the best choice for them under their circumstances, and their right to health care must also be upheld. It is now time to introduce free, safe, and legal abortion on demand in Ireland."