**111th Session of the UN Human Rights Committee**

**Joint NGO Oral Statement regarding the 4th Periodic Review of Ireland under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights**

**Monday, July 14th 2014**

I will address the Committee on Ireland’s abortion laws; list of issues, paragraph 12.

 Abortion is permitted only where there is a risk to a pregnant woman’s *life.* In 2008, the Committee urged the State to "bring its abortion laws in line with the Covenant".

The 2013 Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act introduces new legal barriers to accessing a lawful abortion. Its procedures discriminate against women with mental health problems: it will require three doctors to certify that the abortion can proceed. A review procedure will take up to 10 days and require assessment of the woman by three additional doctors.

The threat of 14 years imprisonment hangs over pregnant women whose *health* is at risk, where there is a foetal anomaly, where pregnancy is the result of a crime, or in any other circumstances. This is cruel and degrading.

The Government will tell you that the 2013 Act criminalises pregnant women and their doctors because this is necessary under the Constitution. However, Irish legal opinion on this matter is far from settled. And if this *is* the case, the State must call a referendum on this constitutional provision.

The State justifies its restrictive laws by permitting travel to and information about abortion in other jurisdictions. This abdication of State responsibility to treat women with dignity by providing necessary health care discriminates against women. Women must carry the entire financial, practical and emotional burden of accessing services abroad.

This burden falls most heavily on minors, women on low incomes, and women who cannot travel freely to another state. These women experience significant delays is travelling; or cannot leave the state.

We ask you to urge the State to adopt specific concrete legislative and other measures to bring the law on abortion into compliance with the Covenant.

**ENDS**

**This statement is delivered on behalf of the following civil society organisations that have made submissions regarding Ireland’s restrictive abortion laws for the 4th Periodic Review of Ireland:**

Abortion Rights Campaign

Centre for Reproductive Rights

Doctors for Choice

Irish Council for Civil Liberties

Irish Family Planning Association

Women's Human Rights Alliance

The statement is also supported by Lawyers for Choice, Ipas and the Termination for Medical Reasons Campaign.

**Representatives of Civil Society Organisations present**

The following civil society representatives are present at the Committee session and are at the disposal of the Committee for any information further to the submissions previously made:

Alison SPILLANE and Sinead CORCORAN (Abortion Rights Campaign)

Richie KEANE and Veronica O’KANE (Doctors for Choice)

Stephen O’HARE (Irish Council for Civil Liberties)

Maeve TAYLOR (Irish Family Planning Association)

Katrine THOMASEN (Centre for Reproductive Rights)

Ruth BOWIE, Amanda MELLET and James BURKE, who are members of the Termination for Medical Reasons Campaign, are also present and can speak directly to the impact of the abortion law in cases of fatal foetal anomaly.