



**United Nations Human Rights Council, 32<sup>nd</sup> Session (13 June – 1 July 2016)**  
**Item 8 General Debate; Follow up and implementation of the Vienna Declaration**  
**27 June 2016**  
**Speaker: BHA representative, Cordelia Tucker O’Sullivan**

Thank you, Mr President.

I am delivering this statement on behalf of the British Pregnancy Advisory Service and the British Humanist Association.

The Vienna Declaration confirms ‘on the basis of equality between women and men, a woman’s right to... the widest range of family planning services’.<sup>1</sup> Yet globally, women find themselves in desperate circumstances, where exercising their right to abortion could result in a prison sentence.

In Northern Ireland, the near total ban does not permit abortion even in cases of rape, incest, or fatal foetal abnormality. In response to a high court ruling that such a law breaches the human rights of women and girls,<sup>2</sup> and despite the UN Human Rights Committee criticising the legislation as putting the lives of Northern Irish women at risk,<sup>3</sup> the Justice Minister and Attorney General are appealing the decision.<sup>4</sup> This is an insult to the thousands of women who must travel abroad to access this medical procedure,<sup>5</sup> the women who have been successfully prosecuted for procuring an illegal abortion for themselves,<sup>6</sup> and the people who have sought abortion services for their children<sup>7</sup> – all of whom are simply wishing to exercise their human rights.

In May last year, Brazil reported the first case of transmission of the Zika virus, which has since spread to 26 countries and territories of the Americas.<sup>8</sup> Access to contraception in many of the affected countries is severely restricted, and abortion even more so. In a region where almost 50% of pregnancies are unplanned and often due to sexual violence, to advise women to avoid getting pregnant<sup>9</sup> ‘ignores the reality that many women...cannot exercise control over...what circumstances they become pregnant’ and is likely to do little to diminish the effects of the disease.<sup>10</sup>

These examples are but two of many cases we must not tolerate where the sexual and reproductive health rights of women are systematically infringed upon. We call on those who have laws and policies which restrict access to reproductive and sexual health services to bring them in line with their human rights obligations as laid out in the ICCPR and Vienna.

Thank you.

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<sup>1</sup> Article 41 of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/nov/30/northern-ireland-law-on-abortion-ruled-as-incompatible-with-human-rights>

<sup>3</sup> Article 17 CCPR/C/GBR/CO/7

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/law/2016/jan/27/abortion-ruling-appeal-northern-ireland-minister-insults-women> and <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/25/northern-ireland-attorney-general-appeal-ruling-abortion-ban>

<sup>5</sup> According to the Family Planning Association <http://www.fpa.org.uk/sites/default/files/northern-ireland-abortion.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> A story covered widely by British newspapers, for example: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/life/northern-irish-21-year-old-woman-given-prison-sentence-over-abort/>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/apr/08/northern-ireland-abortion-women-culture-suspicion-fear-prosecution-belfast>

<sup>8</sup> See the Pan American Health Organization: [http://www.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=11605&Itemid=0&lang=en](http://www.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=11605&Itemid=0&lang=en)

<sup>9</sup> As in Brasil: <https://www.bostonglobe.com/news/world/2016/01/26/officials-brazil-urge-women-avoid-pregnancy-due-zika-virus/Ask7wAjozVQG6SCv80uK8N/story.html>, Colombia, Ecuador, Jamaica: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-35388842>, and El Salvador: [http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/26/world/americas/el-salvadors-advice-on-zika-dont-have-babies.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/26/world/americas/el-salvadors-advice-on-zika-dont-have-babies.html?_r=0)

<sup>10</sup> As the High Commissioner stated in his response to the Zika crisis, in which he highlighted the importance of women and girl’s SRHRs in responding effectively to the crisis: <http://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=17014&LangID=E>