



**United Nations Human Rights Council, 32<sup>nd</sup> Session (13 June – 1 July 2016)**

**Item 3; Interactive Dialogue with the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice**

**20 June 2016**

**Speaker: BHA representative, Cordelia Tucker O'Sullivan**

Thank you, Mr President.

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

We welcome the most recent report<sup>1</sup> from the working group on the issue of discrimination against women, in particular its insistence that the sexual and reproductive health rights of women require access to legal, safe abortion, which places an obligation on states to ensure access to, and information about, such family planning services.

Worldwide, restrictive abortion laws apply to 40% of women,<sup>2</sup> despite the fact that legal restrictions on abortion do not reduce demand for the service.<sup>3</sup>

In some countries, as the result of ‘retrogressive anti-abortion laws, women are imprisoned for having had a miscarriage’.<sup>4</sup> In 2011, a Salvadoran woman went into early labour, ultimately miscarrying. The police were called on the suspicion that she induced her own abortion, and was ultimately condemned to 40 years in prison. She remained there until May this year.<sup>5</sup>

Over the past 35 years, hundreds of thousands of women and girls have travelled from [the Republic of] Ireland to access abortion services in another country. The cost of travelling to the UK for a surgical abortion [below 14 weeks of gestation] is at least €1000.<sup>6</sup> This means that in effect, access to safe abortion is limited to wealthy women and girls, forcing those who are unable to travel abroad to continue with an unwanted or problematic pregnancy, or induce abortion some other way.

We call on those States who have laws and policies which restrict access to reproductive and sexual health services to decriminalize abortion, and ensure women’s and girls’ access to the highest attainable standard of mental and physical healthcare possible.

Thank you.

<sup>1</sup> A/HRC/32/44

<sup>2</sup> A/HRC/32/44, p15

<sup>3</sup> World Health Organisation, ‘Safe abortion: technical and policy guidance for health system’, (2012), p23. Available for download here: [http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/unsafe\\_abortion/9789241548434/en/](http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/unsafe_abortion/9789241548434/en/)

<sup>4</sup> A/HRC/32/44, p15

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.reproductiverights.org/press-room/salvadoran-court-releases-woman-wrongfully-imprisoned>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.ifpa.ie/node/506>