



## FVRJ Statement on Sec of State's Action to Commission Abortion Services: Faith reflections on his use of the words 'moral duty'

Faith Voices for Reproductive Justice (FVRJ) welcomes the announcement by the Secretary of State that he will exercise his powers to direct the commissioning of abortion services in Northern Ireland. It has been over a year since the regulatory framework for abortion here was legally settled, following a public consultation, and we are relieved that the services outlined in these regulations will finally be put in place.

We are particularly interested, as people of faith, in the words used by Secretary of State Brandon Lewis in announcing the forthcoming action. He described his duty to act not just as a legal duty but a moral one. To some this might seem like a strange use of the word moral but we completely understand its relevance since our faith leads us to the same conclusion.

*If you have read about the thousands of women who shared their stories anonymously online through the In Her Shoes Campaign, revealing the hardship and trauma brought about by living under a legal system that criminalises and prohibits abortion, you will understand why this duty is a moral one.*

*If you have heard testimony from advocacy groups like Alliance for Choice who respectfully carry the stories of countless women who've had to leave Northern Ireland over many years to receive compassionate care for complicated pregnancies, you will understand why this duty is a moral one.*

*If you know someone who has faced the devastating task of finding out the best way to bring back their baby's remains after a termination in England, you will understand why this duty is a moral one.*

*If a desperate friend or loved one has ever asked you for money to travel to an abortion clinic, you will understand why this duty is a moral one.*



*If you've ever heard a doctor talk about what it feels like to look a woman in the eye after a devastating fetal diagnosis and tell her that they're sorry they can't help her, you'll understand why this duty is a moral one.*

*If you've had an abortion and carried the stigma of having to leave here because Northern Irish political and religious leaders dictate that abortion is not acceptable enough to be provided in our local healthcare services, you will understand why this duty is a moral one.*

It is important to remember that morality is not something that religion has a monopoly on. When we enter into conversations about ethical and moral values, we should do so as one voice out of many, without claiming to have the right answer and without claiming that all people of faith have the same perspective. At FVRJ we believe in the moral vision of reproductive justice. As people of of faith, understanding all the complexity involved, we believe everyone from every background should be able to choose if and when to have children. We want to build safe and sustainable communities where every family can raise their children with dignity and free from poverty, discrimination and violence. Removing barriers to reproductive healthcare is an important part of that vision. For too long accessing abortion in Northern Ireland has been an issue of inequality. Those without the resources, freedom and safety to travel have felt the greatest impact of the absence of local services.

As sincere people of faith, we believe that building a fair and compassionate society is not just civil work, It is also a sacred and holy undertaking cultivated through prayer and theological reflection. Compassion is a central tenet of every major religion, and for us this includes fair and equal access to the full spectrum of health and social care services, including abortion services, for everyone in Northern Ireland who wishes to avail of them.

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