

**Press Release – Friday 9 December 2022, second week of Advent -
Immediate**

**Attn: News-desks, Photo-desks and Religious Affairs
Correspondents**

Archbishop Eamon Martin: “Buffer zones will further silence the voice of the innocent unborn”

- **The UK Supreme Court judgement will increase fears that freedom of religion, belief, expression and association are being undermined and open to attack**

Statement

The way has now been paved by the UK Supreme Court to impose exclusion zones outside centres in Northern Ireland that provide or facilitate abortions. This is tantamount to enforcing a ban on pro-life activities, including prayer and respectful witness, outside such settings. Buffer zones will further silence the voice of the innocent unborn. Given that the law already prevents harassment and intimidation, I believe the new legislation represents a disproportionate response with potentially wide implications for freedom of religion and speech.

The discussions about abortion in recent years have made us much more aware of the pressures that women can be under during pregnancy and how so many can feel isolated, neglected and alone in their distress. Tragic, and sometimes desperate, situations like these will not go away just because abortion services are made more widely available, or because abortion centres are ‘sealed off’ from peaceful vigils.

Over the years many mothers in crisis have felt supported - sometimes at the very last minute - by a sensitive offer of practical help to find a way out of their crisis other than by ending the life of their unborn baby. It is perfectly reasonable to want to reach out in compassion to help vulnerable women and to be free to protect the life and well-being of both a mother and her unborn child.

Harassment laws are already in place to prevent intimidation. The Supreme Court judgement will increase fears that freedom of religion, belief, expression and association are being undermined and open to attack. The punitive sanctions being introduced will undermine the Common Good as they disproportionately shut down the rights of those who wish to peacefully and prayerfully offer support and alternative options and to save the lives of innocent unborn children.

What next? How long before it is deemed unlawful to openly express the reasonable opinion that there are two lives in every pregnancy worth protecting - the life of a mother and the life of her unborn child?

Will those who believe that the ending of unborn life is of the utmost moral significance, and who have sincerely held beliefs that every human life is sacred from the first moment of conception, be told that they are not free to express these beliefs anywhere in a public forum?

It has never been more important to courageously witness to the inviolable dignity of every human life. The Gospel of Life is, quite literally, Good News for our world in which there is, sadly, so much violence, destruction and unnecessary death. It is Good News for the world to hold that every human life is a precious gift from God – including the lives of all mothers and their unborn children. This remains true, always and everywhere.

Yesterday Catholics celebrated the beautiful Feast of the Immaculate Conception - remembering how God chose Mary from the first moment of her conception - even before she was born into the world - to be the mother of God's Son, and our heavenly Mother also.

The right to life is not conferred by any human law; rather, it is God's most precious gift to us. The innocent life in the womb is not a "something"; it is a "someone." Science confirms that it is, in reality, a little girl or boy at a very early stage in her or his life. To hold this truth, and to express it openly, is not something to be ashamed of, or to be excluded from public discourse, censored from newspaper columns, shut down in debates, or kept out via 'protective buffer zones'! It is something we should be able to shout from the rooftops: All human life is sacred and precious! Choose life!

ENDS

• Archbishop Eamon Martin is Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland

For media contact: Catholic Communications Office Maynooth: Martin Long +353 (0) 86172 7678 and Oisín Walsh +353 (0) 86 1679504

Click [here](#) to subscribe to our weekly *Sharing the Good News* eZine