



Abortion Support Network 26th May 2011

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Anti-choice group sneaked into government sexual health advisory group

Abortion Support Network is deeply concerned to learn of the government's latest decision to appoint anti-choice organisation 'Life' to join its advisory group on sexual health. We believe it is ill-advised and could set back women's abortion rights back by decades.

Abortion Support Network provides confidential, non-judgemental information, accommodation and financial support to women from Ireland and Northern Ireland needing to travel to England for a safe and legal abortion. We are all too aware of the adverse impact anti-choice groups can have on women at such difficult times.

*Women calling us from Ireland or Northern Ireland, where abortion continues to be severely restricted, often tell us first hand about the lack of objectivity and stigma they face from anti-choice organisations. Posing as 'crisis pregnancy centres', they mostly peddle inaccuracies about the health effects of abortion and aim to dissuade women from making the decision that is right for them. Our phone volunteers are often faced with women who have been terrified after being given blatantly false and misleading information, further adding to their stress during what is an already difficult time – being faced with an unwanted pregnancy while living in a country where they cannot access a legal abortion' said **Mara Clarke, Abortion Support Network's Director***

Those opposed to abortion often have little empathy for women who consider or undergo an abortion, and do not respect women's right and ability to make their own decisions about pregnancy. Anti-choice individuals and organisations should have no place on the government's advisory group if it is to ensure that abortion information and services remain unbiased.

End

For more information about our work, visit: <http://www.abortionsupport.org.uk/about/faqs/>

To arrange an interview, please call **Anne Quesney, Abortion Support Network** spokesperson on **+44 (0)7909 974 101**

Notes to the editor

1. Abortion Support Network is an entirely volunteer-run organisation that was established in October 2009 to provide accommodation and financial assistance to women forced to travel from Ireland and Northern Ireland in order to have a safe legal abortion.

2. Abortion Support Network is an all-volunteer organisation that provides information, accommodation and financial assistance to women who are forced to travel to England to access a safe and legal abortion. The information and support we offer is strictly confidential and non-judgemental. Our volunteers provide a meal and a safe place to sleep for women travelling to London for abortions. We also fundraise to provide grants to help towards the cost of having the procedure at a clinic in England. We are the only organisation known to be providing practical support of this kind. For more information or to support our work visit www.abortionsupport.org.uk

3. In Northern Ireland (despite being part of the UK), and the Republic of Ireland, abortion is illegal except under extremely limited circumstances and it is virtually impossible for women to access an abortion legally. In both countries, however, women can legally travel abroad for an abortion. Further information about abortion law in Ireland is available from:

- Irish Family Planning Association: <http://www.ifpa.ie/eng/Hot-Topics/Abortion>
- Bpas Ireland website: <http://www.abortion.ie/index.php?view=category&ID=3271>
- FPA (Northern Ireland): <http://www.fpa.org.uk/campaignsandadvocacy/reproductiverights>

4. In 2010, a total of 5,503 abortions were performed in England and Wales on women resident in Ireland and Northern Ireland (Department of Health, 2011). The actual number of women having abortions abroad is likely to be higher, with additional women giving a false address or travelling to Belgium or The Netherlands for an abortion.

5. Women who travel from Ireland to England for an abortion have to pay for their travel and commonly that of a partner, friend or family member accompanying them (last minute air fares and travel to and from the clinic), often pay for accommodation to stay overnight, and must pay for the procedure as a private patient. The cost of the procedure alone ranges between £350 to £1,775, depending on the stage of their pregnancy. Some women must also pay the costs of childcare for children back home, and take time off work.