

DOCTORS IN CONSCIENCE AGAINST ABORTION BILL

www.doctorsconscience.org

7 October 2008

Honourable Kevin Rudd MP
Prime Minister of Australia
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Prime Minister

We are a group of doctors concerned by the Abortion Law Reform Bill 2008 which is to be introduced for debate into Victoria's Legislative Council today.

We have the following concerns in relation to the Bill:

It fails to respect current medical knowledge and clinical practice.

It offers no support for women facing difficult or unexpected pregnancies.

It endorses poor clinical practices and exposes pregnant women to unnecessary health risks.

It disregards the humanity and basic human rights of the embryonic and foetal child.

In coercing health professionals to participate in the taking of human life against their strong ethical, religious and cultural beliefs, the Bill represents an attack on the basic human rights of health professionals which undermines their moral integrity and professional autonomy.

We have senior legal advice in the form of a Joint Opinion from leading Queen's Counsel and former Federal Court Justice, Mr Neil Young, and Melbourne based human rights barrister, Mr Peter Willis that the Bill is in conflict with Victoria's Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 1996.

A copy of the Opinion and a summary of the Opinion accompany this letter. We have also included a copy of the letter we have sent to Members of the Legislative Council expressing our concerns.

We call upon you to intervene to stop the passage of this Bill so that Australia avoids breaching its treaty obligations and to uphold the following human rights contained in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 1996.

The right to freedom of thought, conscience and belief contained in Articles 18(1) and 18(2).

The right to hold an opinion without interference contained in Article 19.
Freedom from forced or compulsory labour contained in Article 8(3)(a).

We will be holding a press conference at 11.30am today to release the Opinion and to make public the request being made to you.

We urge you to use the authority of your Office and that of your government to prevent the passage of this Bill which, if enacted, will undermine Australia's human rights reputation and place it in breach of its international treaty obligations.

Yours sincerely

Professor Emeritus Graeme Clark, Dr Mary Lewis and Professor David Clarke for
Doctors in Conscience against Abortion Bill