

Richard Burden MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS, LONDON, SW1A 0AA

### **ABORTION IN NORTHERN IRELAND**

Thank you to everyone who has taken the time to write to me on abortion in Northern Ireland.

Abortion is currently illegal in Northern Ireland, and women who procure abortions for any reason can be imprisoned, except for cases where there is a risk to the mother's life. The criminalisation of abortion can lead to women undergoing so-called backstreet abortions, which pose serious risks to a woman's health.

It is my view that all women should have access to safe and legal abortion. Currently, this cannot be legislated for as the Northern Ireland Assembly has not sat since January 2017 because of the main parties' failure to agree a power-sharing arrangement. Last year, I was one of a group of British and Irish parliamentarians who signed a letter to the Editor of the Times calling on the Government in Westminster to repeal sections 58 and 59 of the Offences Against the Person Act, which has continued to criminalise abortion in Northern Ireland.

Some people believe that for the Westminster Government to legislate in such a way would be a violation of the principle of devolution. However, it is important to remember that a founding principle of the Good Friday Agreement, which brought an end to the Troubles and legislated for devolution in Northern Ireland, is compliance of laws with the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). The UK Supreme Court has stated that Northern Ireland's abortion law is incompatible with the ECHR. Decriminalising abortion in Northern Ireland would therefore demonstrate the UK's ongoing commitment to the Good Friday Agreement as well as, of course, ensuring that women have no fewer rights in the six counties of Northern Ireland than women have in other parts of the UK.

Thanks again to everyone who has contacted me about abortion in Northern Ireland.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Richard Burden'.

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