

High Court rules against Northern Ireland's abortion law

November 30 2015, by Gregory Katz

A Belfast High Court ruling is expected to ease Northern Ireland's strict anti-abortion laws to make it easier for women to terminate pregnancies in some cases.

Abortions are illegal in Northern Ireland except in extreme cases when a woman's life is deemed at risk from her pregnancy. Judge Mark Horner said Monday that certain prohibitions violate the provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights—cases where a fetus has fatal abnormalities or when a woman became pregnant as a result of sexual crimes like rape or incest.

John Larkin, [attorney general](#) for Northern Ireland, said he was "profoundly disappointed" by the court's ruling and said he is studying grounds for a possible appeal.

Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom, but it has much more restrictive abortion laws than the other regions.

Judge Horner said the present law making it illegal for a mother to terminate her pregnancy where her fetus cannot survive independently once it leaves the womb constitutes a "gross interference with her [personal autonomy](#)." He said in such cases "there is no life to protect."

Horner also said the existing law is unfair to victims of sexual crimes who become pregnant.

"She has to face all the dangers and problems, emotional or otherwise, of carrying a fetus for which she bears no moral responsibility and is merely a receptacle to carry the child of a rapist and/or a person who has committed incest, or both," he said.

The legal challenge had been brought by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission.

"Today's result is historic, and will be welcomed by many of the vulnerable women and girls who have been faced with these situations," said Les Allamby, the group's commissioner.

The decision was praised by the Royal College of Midwives in Northern Ireland as an important step forward, particularly regarding women carrying fetuses with grave abnormalities.

"It now gives midwives and other health professionals legal protection and a release from the fear of prosecution," in such cases, said Breedagh Hughes, the group's director.

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