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Dutch doctors against 'life complete' assisted suicide

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Dutch doctors have come out against a controversial proposed law that would allow assisted suicide for those who feel their lives are complete, and not just for people in unbearable suffering.

"Such a radical proposal is not desirable for practical reasons and for reasons of principle," the Dutch Doctors Federation, representing some 59,000 practitioners and students, said in a statement late Wednesday.

The Netherlands and neighbouring Belgium became the first countries in the world to legalise euthanasia in 2002.

But it is carried out under strict conditions, and only after at least two doctors have certified that there is no other reasonable solution for the patient, and that their suffering is "unbearable and without any hope of improvement".

In October, the now outgoing government proposed broadening the law to give elderly people, who are not sick but feel their lives are complete, the right to assisted suicide.

It would only apply to those who "no longer see any possibility of giving their life meaning, deeply feel their loss of independence, and remain isolated or lonely perhaps because they have lost a loved one," the Dutch health and justice ministers said in a letter to parliament.

But the doctors' federation argued that passing another law alongside the

euthanasia law "will lead to an erosion of the conscientious practice of euthanasia" and increase "the feeling of vulnerability among elderly people and the stigmatisation of old age."

Instead, it pleaded for greater "investment in solutions which address the feeling of uselessness among the elderly."

The federation has sent its comments to the four political parties currently negotiating to see whether they can agree a common platform and form the country's next coalition government.

The Liberal VVD party which won the most seats in March 15 elections as well as the progressive D66 and the ecologist GroenLinks have voiced support for the law.

But the Christian Democratic Appeal is against it, although the party said it would not be a "deal-breaker" in the talks.

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