

Minnesota Citizens Concerned for Life Inc. Education Fund

Oral Statement

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The practice of assisted suicide in Switzerland should deeply concern the Human Rights Council.

The number of assisted suicides in Switzerland has increased every year since 2008, according to Switzerland's Federal Statistical Office. Many people who are not terminally ill receive assisted suicide—including people with dementia and people with only mental (not physical) illnesses, such as depression.¹

A study in the *Journal of Medical Ethics* found that the percentage of non-terminal assisted suicide patients in Switzerland was growing. It concluded that many patients were opting for suicide because they were “weary of life,” not because they had a “fatal or hopeless medical condition.”² Another study found that in 16 percent of cases no underlying illness was even listed on the death certificate.³

Under the lax Swiss law, a recipient of assisted suicide need not be a citizen of Switzerland. This has led to the practice called “suicide tourism.” A study of suicide tourism found that assisted suicides of foreign nationals in Switzerland were “increasing unabated,” including cases involving mental illness and non-terminal diseases.⁴

Assisted suicide in Switzerland is simply out of control.

Assisted suicide can threaten the right to health by preventing patients from receiving the health care to which they are entitled, including mental health care and palliative care.

Assisted suicide threatens the “inherent right to life” of all human beings that is guaranteed by international law. The U.N. Human Rights Committee has expressed concern about “the lack of independent or judicial oversight to determine that a person seeking assistance to commit suicide is operating with full free and informed consent.” The Committee concluded that Switzerland “should consider amending its legislation” to ensure such oversight.⁵

¹ Federal Statistical Office, “Cause of Death Statistics 2014: Assisted Suicide and Suicide in Switzerland,” October 11, 2016.

² Susanne Fischer et al., “Suicide Assisted by Two Swiss Right-to-Die Organisations,” *Journal of Medical Ethics*, Vol. 34, No. 11 (2008), pp. 810-14.

³ Nicole Steck et al., “Suicide Assisted by Right-to-Die Associations: A Population Based Cohort Study,” *International Journal of Epidemiology*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (2014), pp. 614-22.

⁴ Saskia Gauthier et al., “Suicide Tourism: A Pilot Study on the Swiss Phenomenon,” *Journal of Medical Ethics*, Vol. 41, No. 8 (2014).

⁵ U.N. Human Rights Committee, “Concluding Observations of the Human Rights Committee, Switzerland,” U.N. doc CCPR/C/CHE/CO/3, November 3, 2009.

Assisted suicide also undermines equality and non-discrimination. Research has found that Swiss patients generally have assisted suicides because of concerns about dependency and reduced autonomy.⁶ But the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities protects the right to life of disabled persons “on an equal basis with others.” The right to life applies regardless of age, health, and disability.

No review of the human rights record of Switzerland is complete without seriously taking the facts about assisted suicide into account.

Thank you for your time.

⁶ C. Gamondi et al., “Families’ Experiences with Patients Who Died after Assisted Suicide: A Retrospective Interview Study in Southern Switzerland,” *Annals of Oncology*, Vol. 24, No. 6 (2013), pp. 1639-44.