

Oral Statement
39th Session of the Human Rights Council
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Canada passed a law in June 2016 officially legalizing assisted suicide and euthanasia. Through the end of 2017, the Canadian government reports that a total of 3,714 of these deaths have taken place, with the number increasing with each six-month period.¹ The emerging and growing practice of euthanasia in Canada raises human rights concerns and must be carefully evaluated.

Euthanasia in Canada may not always be voluntary. Euthanasia deaths are self-reported by the doctors and nurse practitioners who perform the euthanasia; abuses of Canada's euthanasia requirements would be difficult to uncover. And some patients have reported that they have been pressured by others to undergo euthanasia rather than treatment,² or that they have been denied care and offered death instead.³

Canada's law requires that, in order for euthanasia to be performed, a patient's death be "reasonably foreseeable." But this requirement has been loosely interpreted so that it encompasses non-terminal conditions.⁴ The limitation has also been challenged; some have called for euthanasia to be permitted on patients who have only mental (rather than physical) health problems or long-term disabilities, people with dementia, and children under the age of 18.

Canada's euthanasia policy also undermines equality and nondiscrimination. One Canadian doctor, for example, tells the story of a young man with a neurological disease who had "suicidal depression." "Any able-bodied person would be given psychological help to relieve it," writes the doctor. "This disabled man, who was nowhere near dying, was instead killed by a Vancouver physician."⁵

The right to life and right to health belong to the disabled and dependent no less than to the strong and able-bodied. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities considers "discrimination against any person on the basis of disability ... a violation of the inherent dignity and worth of the human person" (preamble).

The human rights concerns surrounding euthanasia in Canada must be taken into serious consideration.

Thank you.

1 Government of Canada, "Third Interim Report on Medical Assistance in Dying in Canada," May 31, 2017.

2 Stephen Roberts, "St. Anthony Mother Claims Physician-Assisted Death Was Wrongly Offered for Her Daughter," *Northern Pen*, July 19, 2017.

3 "'The Solution Is Assisted Life': Offered Death, Terminally Ill Ont. Man Files Lawsuit," *CTV News*, March 15, 2018.

4 Alyshah Hasham, "Advocates Hail Judge's Decision in Woman's Assisted Death Appeal," *Toronto Star*, June 19, 2017.

5 Will Johnston, "New Assisted Dying Law Will Claim Unintended Victims," *HuffPost Canada*, September 28, 2016.