

Oral Statement
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Colombia's euthanasia policy has not received significant attention. But it raises serious human rights concerns.

Euthanasia is permitted in Colombia when a patient makes a voluntary request for death and has received a terminal diagnosis. Earlier this year, Colombia passed a resolution expanding this policy to children. Children as young as 6 years old may seek euthanasia. And children over the age of 14 may receive euthanasia without the consent of their parents.

This is very, very troubling. The immaturity of children inhibits their ability to make sound decisions and give proper consent. The UN Human Rights Committee has in the past objected to the euthanasia policy in the Netherlands, where children as young as 12 may receive lethal injections.

"The Committee considers it difficult to reconcile a reasoned decision to terminate life with the evolving and maturing capacities of minors," the Committee wrote. "In view of the irreversibility of euthanasia and assisted suicide, the Committee wishes to underline its conviction that minors are in particular need of protection."¹

Likewise, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child wrote in 2015 that it "remains concerned that euthanasia [in the Netherlands] can be applied to patients under 18 years of age."²

These concerns are fully warranted, and Colombia's new policy of child euthanasia is even more extreme. This issue cannot simply be ignored.

Euthanasia also threatens the right to health. The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights last year expressed concern about Colombia's "prevailing disparities in the availability, accessibility, quality and affordability of health-care services."³ Facilitating euthanasia in these circumstances, rather than working to improve care, may deprive children of their right to "the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health" (Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child).

Colombia's euthanasia policy must be reconsidered in light of these human rights concerns. The Declaration of the Rights of the Child says that "the child, by reason of his physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection" (preamble). Children must be protected.

Thank you.

1 U.N. Human Rights Committee, "Concluding Observations of the Human Rights Committee, The Netherlands," U.N. doc CCPR/CO/72/NET, 2001.

2 U.N. Committee on the Rights of the Child, "Concluding Observations on the Fourth Periodic Report of the Netherlands," U.N. doc CRC/C/NDL/CO/4, July 16, 2015, paragraph 28.

3 U.N. Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, "Concluding Observations on the Sixth Periodic Report of Colombia," U.N. doc E/C.12/COL/CO/6, October 19, 2017, paragraph 61.