



MEDIA RELEASE

Proposed Federal Anti-suicide Laws Violate United Nations International Covenant

Wednesday 25 May 2005 marks the 10th anniversary of the passing of the world's first Death with Dignity legislation in the Parliament of the Northern Territory of Australia.

Led by then Chief Minister Marshall Perron, the Rights of the Terminally Ill Act was the first Bill – anywhere in the world – to allow a terminally ill person to receive medical assistance to end their life.

Ironically, the Federal Government is celebrating this milestone by passing draconian Internet censorship laws which will challenge the fundamental right of Australians to speak freely on end-of-life issues.

The Crimes Act Amendment (Suicide Related Materials Offences) Bill 2005 makes it crime for an Australian citizen to use the telephone, fax, email or Internet to seek, send or simply discuss information about one's end of life options.

In passing this law, Australia will breach its obligations under the United Nations *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* to which we are signatory.

Of this *Covenant*, Article 19 states: "Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his [sic] choice."

Exit International considers it hypocritical of the Australian Government to undertake to abide by a Convention, only to blatantly breach it when the politics suit.

Exit considers it entirely inappropriate for the Australian Government to become arbiter of the type of information that rational, adult Australians - and others who face painful, debilitating terminal illnesses - can read and have access to.

Exit International is currently taking legal advice with a view to mounting a challenge in the International Courts on behalf of all Australians who believe it is their fundamental right to have access to all manner of information, regardless of the medium through which it can be made available.

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