



Media Release

Community Group Dismayed at Speaker's Decision

This Saturday marks the 10th anniversary of the world's first voluntary euthanasia legislation. The Rights of the Terminally Ill Act (ROTI) passed by the NT Government came into effect on 1st July 1996. To mark this important anniversary, Exit International approached the NT government requesting the use of the Assembly foyer for a display to mark this historic event.

Exit was advised today that although Chief Minister Clare Martin and the leader of the Opposition saw no difficulty in allowing such a display, the Speaker, The Hon Jane Aagaard has refused the request.

Spokesperson for the Speaker, Kent Rowe said today that there would not be any space available for such a display, and that there would be no time in the next year when such a display could be set up. Exit was informed that this was because of the "controversial nature" of the issue, and that the issue had the potential to "divide the community".

Exit Director Dr Philip Nitschke stressed that the Rights of the Terminally Ill Act initiated by former Chief Minister Marshall Perron and enacted under Chief Minister Shane Stone, was a world first and something the Northern Territory can be proud of. The ROTI Act only lasted 8 months before the Federal government crushed this legislation with the passage of the Kevin Andrew's Bill.

"Four of my very sick patients were able to use this law before it was overturned in 1997. Since then other countries have followed the Territory's lead and introduced similar legislation. Sick people can now get help to die in Oregon, Holland and Belgium and Switzerland – but the Territory was first. We led the way in dying with dignity. This is an event in Territory history to be remembered".

It was intended that the Remonstrance which was signed by all NT politicians to petition the Federal government would form part of the planned display in the Assembly foyer. Also included were historic documents not seen before, including the original signed request for assistance to die by the first person to use the Act, cancer sufferer Bob Dent. Photographic material for display included images of the machine used by the four patients. The original machine is currently on permanent display the British Museum in London.

Dr Nitschke said that the Speaker's decision was extremely disappointing and showed a poor understanding of the national and international significance of this part of NT history.

To remember the 10th anniversary of the ROTI legislation, supporters will gather at the Roma Bar in Cavenagh Street at 10am Friday 30th June, prior to a walk down the Darwin Smith Street Mall to Raintree Park gathering at Middy.

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