



## Dear Jacinda,

We are writing to you as mothers – and as women who have experienced abortion.

We identify with the joy your baby has brought you and Clarke this past year. Hearing her heartbeat for the first time. Deciding on a name. And now enjoying her smiles and the softness of her skin. The whole nation truly shares in your happiness.

We also have a question for you, Prime Minister. And as the debate begins on abortion law reform, it is a question which becomes crucial: *when does humanity begin?*

### THE RED LINE

**The red line** on this page represents the seamless stream of time from conception to birth. Where on that timeline would you mark the moment human life begins? What happened in that moment to turn growing human tissue into a growing human being?

Many have attempted to define this point: for example, when the heart beats (4 weeks)<sup>1</sup>, the moment of brain activity (6 weeks)<sup>2</sup>, or at the point of viability – when, if born prematurely, the baby has a chance of survival (22-27 weeks)<sup>3</sup>.

**There are biological problems** with almost all beginning-of-humanity markers. At every point on this line, even at conception, the 23 chromosomes from each parent are already in place, as is all the genetic information required for a lifetime. Staggering amounts of *development* will take place, but on what grounds do we decide that a change inside the womb is the *becoming* of a child rather than simply the *growing* of a child?

### A WOMAN'S RIGHT TO DECIDE

Arguably the most defining argument for abortion is the right of a woman to determine what happens to her body. “*My body, my choice*” is the abbreviated argument. There is truth in those four words, and legal protection is already given to women.

But while there is truth, we believe it is not the whole truth. *My body*, is not *the only body*, which means *my rights* are not *the only rights*.

The moment an unborn child's humanity is recognised, the rights of a woman are reframed – and not simply by law.

All good mothers, who have the right to eat, drink, and do as they please, willingly curb their rights for the wellbeing of their unborn children.

But a mother's love does not give her unborn child humanity and human rights. We believe love is an acknowledgment that inside the womb is a *who*, not a *what*; a *child*, not a *thing*. And in a progressive society, that instinct is supported by the full weight of law, ensuring that the rights of its most vulnerable citizens are given the same legal protection as all others.

### THE IMPACT ON THE WOMAN

The acknowledgement that abortion ends a life is one of the reasons we – and thousands of others – live with regret and sadness. We did what we thought was best at the time, encouraged or in some cases pressured by those around us. But we have suffered. We acknowledge all women are different, and their experiences of abortion are different, but New Zealand scientists have found women who have abortions are 30% more likely to experience mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, suicide ideation and substance abuse.<sup>4</sup>

**None of this is easy.** When there are two bodies involved, and two people with human rights, it can be a complex legal dance to protect them both. What is clear to us is that giving human rights solely to the mother at the expense of the life of a child is not something any good society would do. Nor is disregarding the health impacts of abortion. It is clear to us that abortion is both a health issue and a legal issue.

### WHERE WILL YOU PLACE YOUR MARK?

Prime Minister, so much hangs on where you place your mark on the timeline.

A failure to locate the mark – or a failure to be cautious in doing so – may find us inadvertently killing human beings rather than merely ‘removing human tissue.’ And a failure to acknowledge that many suffer after abortion is a failure to care for women's health.

For you, the task is harder because your stance will be public; you will be acutely aware of the political implications.

Jacinda, as our Prime Minister, and as a mother, err on the side of caution. Do everything in your power to shape our laws to reflect the caution that this life-and-death issue surely warrants.

Barbara Hill

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Linda C.

Mother of 2 (1 aborted)

Erena Lagas

Mother of 3 (2 aborted)

Marina Young

Mother of 4 (1 aborted)

Karmenne Prebble

Mother of 7 (1 aborted, 1 adopted)

Sylvia Bowden

Mother of 3 (1 aborted)

Dawn Green

Mother of 4 (1 aborted)

Angela Hughes

Mother of 4 (1 aborted)