**PCI responds to Secretary of State’s**

**latest abortion move**

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI) has described the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland’s further intervention today (19 May) to ensure the commissioning of the most destructive liberal abortion regime in these islands as, ‘a continued assault on the preciousness of life.’

In a joint statement, Reverend Trevor Gribben, Clerk of the General Assembly and General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, and Reverend Daniel Kane, Convener of PCI’s Council for Public Affairs, said, “Our deep and abiding concern is for the welfare of everyone, which includes the unborn child, but also the long-term good of mothers, and the fact that all life is precious whether pre-born or post-natal. We never thought Northern Ireland would lead the way with such immoral and liberal laws, having had legislation previously that sought to strike a careful balance between protecting the life of the mother and the unborn child. We see today’s intervention by Mr Lewis as not only unjust, but a continued assault on the preciousness of life.”

“As a caring community of faith we recognise the sensitivities and complexities which arise for women, and their families, who experience a crisis during pregnancy that leads them to consider termination. This is why we have voiced our support and advocated for the introduction of state-of-the-art perinatal care services to offer practical, emotional and spiritual support in these difficult circumstances,” they said.

The senior Presbyterians were speaking after the Secretary of State used powers given to him by the UK Parliament earlier this year to empower him to direct Northern Ireland Departments, in this instance in relation to commissioning abortion services.

Mr Gribben and Mr Kane continued, “In recent weeks the Secretary of State and UK Government have indicated that listening to the people of Northern Ireland has led to changes in their thinking around legacy and their approach to the Northern Ireland Protocol. And yet with this action the Secretary of State is ignoring the voices of the 79 per cent of the 21,000 individuals and organisations who responded to the Northern Ireland Office’s 2019 abortion consultation, opposing its plans.

“Mr Lewis was under no obligation to bring forward this maximalist approach to implementing the recommendations of the 2018 Report of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, known as ‘*The CEDAW Report’*. Not only that, but he has in effect, been given a blank cheque to interfere unilaterally with many aspects of the devolved administration in Northern Ireland. As we have consistently said, such a power grab by the UK Government would be unthinkable in the Scottish, or Welsh devolved contexts.”

In conclusion, Mr Gribben and Mr Kane said, “While the Secretary of State’s move to undermine the principles at the heart of the finely balanced devolved settlement in Northern Ireland is a political act, we see the removal of protection of the lives of unborn children as an unacceptable, immoral and retrograde step.”