

Prime Minister, we are still awaiting your reply: When does human life begin?



Dear Jacinda,

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

Last year we asked you a question, Prime Minister: publicly and by email. You did not reply. But as the debate on abortion law reform ramps up, it is a question which becomes crucial: *when does human life begin?*

THE RED LINE

The red line on this page represents the stream of time from conception to birth. Prime Minister, where on the timeline would you mark the moment human life begins?

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

But what happened, in any beginning-of-life moment one might choose, to turn growing human tissue into a growing human being? At every point on this line, even at conception, the chromosomes from each parent are already in place, as is 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 CHILD, NOT A THING

Probably 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 rhetoric.

But while there is truth in those four words, 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 human rights. 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.

A COMPLEX LEGAL DANCE

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. But we have suffered. We acknowledge women’s experiences of abortion differ, 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.⁴

None of this is easy. When there are two bodies involved, 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.

WHERE WILL YOU PLACE YOUR MARK?

As our Prime Minister, so much hangs on when you say human life begins: on where you would 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.’

Prime Minister, we ask you again:
when does human life begin?



1. http://www.ehd.org/dev_article_unit4.php 2. http://www.ehd.org/dev_article_unit7.php 3. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fetal_viability 4. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19043144>

Hannah El-Ojeili Da Via
Mother of 3 (incl. 1 aborted)

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)

Barbara Hill abortionloss@gmail.com
Mother of 4 (incl. 1 aborted)

Kirsty Cameron
Mother of 2 (1 aborted)

Dawn Green
Mother of 4 (1 aborted)

Sylvia Bowden
Mother of 3 (1 aborted)

Angela Hughes
Mother of 4 (1 aborted)

Robyn Jackson
Mother of 5 (1 aborted, 1 adopted)

E. Bayly
Mother of 4 (1 aborted)