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WOMEN'S LEGAL STATUS COMMITTEE

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The Secretary
Technical Committee for Fundamental Rights
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Dear Sir/Madam

Legal abortion lowers the overall abortion rate and maternal death rate.

The Women's Legal Status Committee believes that the right to abortion should be included in any Bill of Rights and that South Africa should include the relevant portions from the UN Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women signed by President de Klerk. South Africa will then join the rest of the world regarding freedom of choice in abortion.

In support of this statement the following points are provided:

The findings of the International Planned Parenthood Federation, reported in the British Medical Journal (Vol. 36, 5 June 1993), have shown that the Netherlands has now the lowest abortion rate in the world. 'Abortion is available on demand in the Netherlands.' 'In Western Europe (except for Ireland) where abortion is most easily available the rate is 14 per 1000 women, in Latin America, where a legal abortion is difficult to obtain the rate is 30 to 60 per 1000 women.' Clearly legal abortion reduces the total number of abortions.

According to the British Medical Journal (Vol. 298, 6 May 1989) in the 1950's abortion was the main cause of maternal death. The number of women who died between 1961 and 1963, was 160, yet after the UK 1967 Abortion Act, this number fell to four in the period 1985 to 1987. In 1965 two years before the 1967 Abortion Act there were 3050 cases of sepsis caused by abortion which fell to 390 in 1982.

Our hospital services are seriously overstretched (Sunday Times, 11 and 18 July 1993). If the pattern in the UK is followed it is likely that we can also reduce the rate of sepsis and the medical skills and costs involved.

Access to legal abortion must be protected.