

CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF INDIA

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THE CHURCH STANDS FOR LIFE: A SOLEMN DECLARATION ON THE INVIOLEABLE SANCTITY OF UNBORN HUMAN LIFE

In Response to the Direction of the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India Pertaining to the Termination of a Thirty-Week Pregnancy of a Minor on April 30, 2026.

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI), has followed with profound anguish and grave moral concern the reports emanating from the proceedings before the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India, wherein AIIMS, New Delhi has been directed to consider the termination of a pregnancy of approximately thirty (30) weeks-that is, a fully-formed human child in the womb-on the grounds that the biological parents are minors under Indian law.

The CBCI acknowledges, with sincere human compassion, the deeply distressing circumstances confronting the minor parents in this case. The Church holds in the highest regard the dignity and well-being of every vulnerable person, including minors who find themselves in crisis. We reiterate our unwavering commitment to pastoral accompaniment, material support, and charitable assistance for all such persons, in accordance with the Church's perennial tradition of mercy.

However, the CBCI must with equal clarity and without any equivocation declare: the legal minority of the biological parents cannot, under any framework of moral reasoning-whether derived from natural law, positive divine law, canonical law, or constitutional principle-constitute a valid justification for the deliberate termination of the life of a child at thirty weeks of gestation. At this stage of intrauterine development, the child in the womb possesses fully formed vital organs, a functioning neurological system, the established capacity to perceive pain, developed respiratory musculature, and all the essential anthropological attributes of a human person deserving of the law's full protection.

To authorise, facilitate, or perform the killing of such a child is, in the considered moral judgement of the Church, an act of homicide. The description of such an act as a "crime against humanity"- is not rhetorical flourish. It is a juridically precise moral characterisation that the CBCI solemnly endorses and reiterates before the nation and before God.

The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971, as amended, whatever its legitimate therapeutic applications in early pregnancy, must never be construed or applied as a legislative licence for the destruction of fully viable human life at thirty weeks of gestation. The CBCI respectfully yet firmly submits that the judiciary, in the exercise of its noble function of upholding constitutional values, is solemnly bound by Article

21 of the Constitution of India to extend the protection of the right to life and dignity to the unborn child who is indisputably, at thirty weeks, a living human being endowed with the full capacity for extra-uterine viability.

India is a civilisation, not merely a State. The moral wisdom enshrined in her ancient scriptural and philosophical traditions speaks with unambiguous authority on the sanctity of life in the womb. The CBCI invokes this shared civilizational heritage as evidence that the protection of unborn life is not the monopoly of any single religious tradition, but is the common inheritance of the entire Indian people.

The *Manusmriti* (Chapter XI, vv. 88–89) enumerates *Bhrunahatya* —the deliberate killing of the foetus or embryo—among the *Mahapatakas*, the most grievous category of moral transgressions in the Dharmik tradition, equating it in its gravity with *Brahmahatya* —the killing of a Brahmin, universally regarded in Hindu moral theology as the gravest of sins against a human person. This equivalence is of decisive moral import: to destroy a life in the womb is, in Hindu Dharmic understanding, a transgression of the first magnitude, equal in its heinousness to the murder of the most exalted member of society.

The *Atharva Veda* (VIII.6.23) employs the term *Bhruna-ghni* —one who destroys the embryo—as a designation of singular moral opprobrium, ranking such a person among the greatest of sinners. The *Garuda Purana* and the *Vishnu Purana* describe with gravity the consequences reserved for those who destroy life in the womb, affirming the foundational Vedantic anthropology that the *jiva* —the immortal individual soul— dwells within and animates the body from its formation in the *garbha* (womb). To destroy the *garbha* is therefore to commit violence against a living, ensouled being, not merely an aggregate of biological tissue.

The *Charaka Samhita*, the supreme foundational text of the Ayurvedic tradition and among the oldest systems of medical ethics in the world, explicitly teaches that the *garbha* is a living, conscious being from the moment of its formation, and declares its protection to be a primary and non-negotiable obligation of the physician and of society. This ancient Indian medical ethic antedates and in many respects anticipates the modern Hippocratic tradition in its categorical rejection of any deliberate harm to the unborn.

The *Mahabharata* (Shanti Parva) and the *Arthashastra* of Kautilya likewise prescribe severe consequences for those who cause the destruction of an unborn child, situating such acts within the framework of offences against the fundamental order of dharma and of the State. India's ancient lawgivers and sages were unanimous in their conviction that the life growing in the womb is sacred, inviolable, and under the protection of both divine and human law.

The CBCI therefore states with profound conviction: to permit the killing of a thirty-week-old, fully formed, living child in the womb is to violate not only the sacred teaching of the Catholic Church but also the most solemn and unanimous injunctions of India's own civilizational, philosophical, and religious heritage. This is not a question

of sectarian preference. It is a question of our common humanity, our shared dharma, and our collective obligation before God and before history.

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of India respectfully and urgently appeals to:

1. The Hon'ble Supreme Court of India: to uphold the inviolable right to life of the unborn child at thirty weeks, and to decline authorisation for the termination of this pregnancy. We appeal to the Court's own jurisprudence, which has consistently interpreted Article 21 of the Constitution in its broadest and most humane sense, extending its protection to those most defenceless among us. The legal minority of the parents is a circumstance that demands pastoral remedy, social support, and the application of child protection law-not the violent elimination of an innocent third party who is himself, or herself, a person bearing rights under the Constitution and under the natural law which undergirds it.

2. The Hon'ble Government of India and the Legislature: to urgently and comprehensively review the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971 with a view to establishing unambiguous and enforceable legal protection for viable unborn children, particularly those at or beyond the threshold of extra-uterine viability. The State's first duty is the protection of human life. The law must never become an instrument of violence against the most defenceless members of the human family.

3. The Medical and Scientific Fraternity: to remember the foundational imperative of all medical ethics, both ancient and modern—*primum non nocere*, first, do no harm. The physician's sacred vocation is to heal and to preserve life, not to destroy it. We call upon AIIMS-one of the premier medical institutions of this nation-and upon the entire medical fraternity of India to refuse any cooperation in procedures that constitute the deliberate killing of a viable human being, and to exercise conscientious objection in accordance with their professional and moral duty.

4. All Persons of Goodwill and All Citizens of India: to raise their voices in defence of the unborn, regardless of religious affiliation, caste, or community, and to demand of the State the fulfilment of its solemn constitutional and moral obligation to protect every human life from its inception. The silence of the just in the face of injustice is itself a form of complicity. Let every conscience be awakened to its duty.

The CBCI pledges the full social, institutional, and material resources of the Catholic Church in India-to the care of the minor parents in this case, and to all those in similar distress throughout our nation. The Church's extensive network of hospitals, homes for mothers, child care institutions, orphanages, and social service organisations stands ready, in the spirit of the Gospel and in fidelity to teachings of the Church which mandate the faithful to promote social justice and to assist the poor, to accompany, support, and restore the dignity of every person in crisis-mother, father, and child alike.

Our position on the sanctity of life is not one of indifference to human suffering. It is, rather, born of the deepest respect for the dignity of every human person-born and

unborn. The suffering of one person-however real and however deeply we mourn it-cannot be remedied by the deliberate destruction of another. This is the perennial wisdom of the Church, confirmed alike by the natural law and echoed by the moral tradition of every great civilisation that has honoured the sanctity of life.

We commend this cause, and the lives of all concerned, to the merciful providence of Almighty God, and to the conscience of every person of goodwill in this great nation.

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