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A BILL THAT AMENDS THE EMBRYO PROTECTION ACT

STATEMENT BY THE MALTESE BISHOPS

We Maltese treasure our children and life from the beginning of conception. This is a very positive attitude that we want to encourage in no uncertain terms. For this reason we express our profound appreciation to those who strive to give their timely and proper assistance to infertile couples in their desire to have children.

In this context, it is with great sadness that we read the proposed amendments to the Embryo Protection Act.

It seems that the amendments proposed in the said Bill go against the principal aim of the present law which seeks to assist infertile couples who are in a stable relationship. In doing so, it also protects the dignity of embryos from beginning of life and throughout their development into childhood by making sure that they are born and raised by their natural mother and father.

Not so in the proposed bill. The child becomes a commodity to satisfy another person's desires. Anyone who wants a child, whoever he or she may be, can 'make' one with the blessing of the proposed law. When the law introduces the possibility of anonymous donors of gametes, the possibility of using another woman's womb for gestation (surrogacy), the freezing of embryos, it is the law itself that makes the child a commodity.

It is very worrying to consider that these amendments could produce children who might never know their natural mother or their natural father, who will never know the identity of their siblings, cousins, aunts, uncles, and grandparents. The proposed Bill is deliberately introducing a new type of orphans. It is already a source of great pain when children, for one reason or another, are denied the great gift of being raised by their own mother and father. That the law itself is responsible for new situations that will also increase the discrimination between children, is very disquieting.

Children are precious and do not deserve such callous treatment. They deserve to be safeguarded in their physical, emotional, psychological, moral, and spiritual needs. They are the future generations that will reap what is being sown today.

We are also troubled by the proposal of the freezing of embryos by choice. There are many other ethical problems associated with embryo freezing including the risk that a number of embryos that will be frozen may not be adopted and thus will remain unwanted. Due to adult choices, these children conceived by technology may never see the light of day.

Our appeal is directed towards those who are responsible for this Bill so that they truly protect life and human dignity and do nothing that will undermine the rights and well being of the child.

✠ **Charles J. Scicluna**

Archbishop of Malta

✠ **Mario Grech**

Bishop of Gozo