

Government insists abortion change is matter for MLAs



Stella Creasy, Labour MP for Walthamstow

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Today's court judgement on the subject of abortion in Northern Ireland has led to renewed calls for MPs to override devolution and directly

re-write Northern Ireland's abortion laws – although the government continued to stress that it wants the matter to rest with MLAs.

Sinn Fein's Northern Ireland leader Michelle O'Neill said the judgement "makes it clear that legislative change is required on abortion in the north".

She said the issue of abortion "demands compassion", and that Northern Irish law is "failing women".

According to the Conflict Archive on the Internet (an online archive of Troubles deaths run by the University of Ulster) the IRA killed a minimum of 138 women or girls from 1969 to 2001 – far more than any other single organisation.

On the subject of what the next steps are for changing the law on abortion, Ms O'Neill told Radio Ulster: "I never want Westminster to legislate for local issues."

But she then went on to add that she is "absolutely all for" of a planned piece of law due to come before Westminster.

Known as the Domestic Abuse Bill, Labour's Stella Creasy has pledged to table an amendment to it which will repeal bits of an 1861 act that provides life sentences for people who break abortion law.

Amid a fresh wave of calls from both Conservative and Labour MPs for Westminster to re-write the Province's laws itself, Northern Ireland Secretary Karen Bradley told the Commons that said the government's position remains that "we want the politicians in Northern Ireland to make the law on abortion in Northern Ireland".

She also said that repealing the 1861 law as Ms Creasy intends would mean “we would be left with no laws on abortion in Northern Ireland... I do not think a vacuum of laws in Northern Ireland would be helpful to those women and girls we are all thinking about”.

Ms Creasy, Labour MP for Walthamstow in London, has been a leading voice in calling for a change to the law in Northern Ireland, and today tweeted or re-tweeted 18 messages in under five hours about the court case.

They included messages from her saying “trust all women”, “women’s rights are human rights”, as well as one which lamented cases of “MPs saying how sad they feel about situation in Northern Ireland but shrugging their duties to act to protect human rights set out in Good Friday Agreement”.

She met with Sinn Fein in London today to discuss the matter.

On Tuesday Ms Creasy had called for the government to put the Domestic Abuse Bill before Parliament within 150 days.

As of Wednesday, the Ministry of Justice told the News Letter no date had been confirmed for bringing the bill before MPs.

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