

UN: Irish laws on abortion are cruel and degrading

By James Rothwell

IRELAND'S abortion laws subject women to cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment, a UN inquiry has ruled, in a landmark decision that will raise pressure on Dublin and other governments to repeal bans on the practice.

The judgment by the UN's human rights committee demands that Ireland relax its abortion laws to allow "accessible procedures for pregnancy termination". The ruling was based on a complaint by Amanda Mellet, who in 2011 was told she could not have an abortion in Ireland even though her foetus had serious birth defects, meaning it would almost certainly die in the womb or shortly after birth.

Ms Mellet was forced to pay her way to England, where doctors in Liverpool induced a 36 hour labour period resulting in a stillborn baby girl. She said she had to return to Ireland within 12 hours of the abortion as she could not afford to stay longer, which added even more stress and discomfort to the procedure.

According to the UN, ashes of her

Many of the negative experiences [Ms Mellet] went through could have been avoided'

foetus were then "unexpectedly delivered to her three weeks later by courier", which left her traumatised.

Ms Mellet was also denied access to state bereavement counselling because under Irish law the services are only offered to women who carry their foetuses to the point of birth or miscarriage.

This worsened the shame and stigma she felt in Ireland as a result of having an abortion, the committee said.

It added that Ireland, which is predominantly Roman Catholic, inflicted "intense suffering" on Ms Mellet in its handling of her case. Abortion is only permitted in Ireland in extreme circumstances, such as when the life of the mother would be in danger if she went ahead with the pregnancy.

Ireland's government said it found the UN's findings "deeply upsetting" but did not have immediate plans to change the law.

◆ Britain must stop forcing children to attend Christian school assemblies because it undermines their human rights, the UN committee ruled. It called on ministers to repeal a law demanding a daily act of Christian worship because it may contradict a child's "freedom of thought, conscience and religion". The report also called on the government to protect children from being smacked by parents as it urged a tougher line on domestic abuse.