

Assisted suicide for "completed life"

The Netherlands is one of a handful of jurisdictions where euthanasia has been legalised.

Developments there since legalisation in 2003 show that once exceptions are introduced to the law on murder and assisted suicide, permitting the killing of some categories of people, there is no logical or social barrier to expanding the categories of people who can be killed.

The latest Defend Human Life blog at defendhumanlife.blogspot.com analyses these developments in detail.

Assisted suicide for "completed life"

On 12 October 2016 the Netherlands Government formally reported to the Parliament its response to the February 2016 report of a commission on assisted suicide for "completed life".^[1] The report considered the possibility of expanding the law to specifically provide for legalised assisted suicide for people who felt their life was complete but who did not qualify under the existing law because there was no medical basis for the feeling that life was an unbearable burden. The report suggested that in most cases such people could be accommodated under the existing law by the increasingly broad interpretation being given to its requirements.

However, the government's response, cosigned by Edith Schippers, Minister of Health, Welfare and Sport and Ard van der Steur, Minister of Security and Justice, proposes a new law – to be drafted in 2017 – to specifically legalise assisted suicide for those who feel that their life is complete and who wish to die in cases where there is no underlying medical basis for this feeling.

The government proposes the creation of a new category of community worker – *stervenshulpverlener* – a death worker

The role of a death worker would be to assess whether the person's request for assisted suicide was voluntary and persistent and that there were no reasonably available medical or social measures to relieve the feeling that life was a burden.

The government response points out that the existing law on euthanasia is premised on a doctor being confronted with a patient who has unbearable suffering that cannot be relieved other than by deliberately ending the patient's life. Euthanasia is portrayed as an act of mercy.

The government response suggests that for persons who feel that they have completed their life and that to continue living it is a burden the State also can facilitate an act of mercy – namely after approval by a death worker and confirmation by a second death expert, facilitating assisted suicide.

There is a suggestion that as this feeling of completed life is most common in elderly people it would be in order to impose a minimum age limit but no indication is given as to what this might be.

These developments should be a warning for MPs in South Australia who are currently confronted with yet another bill to legalise euthanasia and assisted suicide and in Victoria where such a bill may be introduced in 2017.