

CATHOLICS FOR CHOICE

IN GOOD CONSCIENCE

President Leonel Fernández Reyna
By E-mail

September 1, 2009

Dear President Leonel Fernández Reyna,

Catholics for Choice is writing to urge you to change the language in Article 30 which, as currently drafted, would establish a right to life from conception. If approved, this language would have dire consequences for women and families throughout the Dominican Republic.

While the hierarchy of the Catholic church in the Dominican Republic has been outspoken in its support of Article 30, Catholic teachings on the matter are not as clear cut as the bishops have suggested. Catholics can—in good conscience—support prochoice policies. Church teachings on moral decision-making and abortion are complex and far more nuanced than the monolithic teachings the bishops present. In Catholic theology there is room for the acceptance of policies that favor access to the full range of reproductive health options, including contraception and abortion. In addition, the church has acknowledged that it does not know when the fetus becomes a person and has never declared its position on abortion to be infallible.

At the heart of church teachings on moral matters is a deep regard for an individual's conscience. The Catechism states that "a human being must always obey the certain judgment of his conscience." Catholic teaching holds that when the church cannot speak definitively on a matter of fact, the consciences of individual Catholics must be primary and respected.

Catholic teachings on the primacy of conscience hold that the individual Catholic must follow his or her conscience—even if it is in conflict with church teaching. In addition, Catholic teaching requires at least tolerance if not respect for another person's decision. Catholic parliamentarians are therefore free to follow their own consciences, and to support policies that allow all people to make informed, conscientious decisions about their own lives and those of their families.

Politicians the world over, Catholic and otherwise, have found that keeping to their principles and paying close attention to the views of the constituents who elected them, rather than the local Catholic bishop, have paved the way to longevity in elected office. Catholics in the pew support access to quality reproductive healthcare services, with no stigma attached to those who choose abortion or those who choose to carry a pregnancy to term.

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Instead of approving language which would restrict access to abortion and contraception, Catholics for Choice urges policymakers in the Dominican Republic to stand up for women's rights and amend the language in Article 30 so that it is consistent with the needs and rights of women and families in the Dominican Republic.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jon O'Brien." The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "J" and "O".

Jon O'Brien
President, Catholics for Choice

Cc

Mr. Reynaldo Pared Perez, *President of the Assembly*

Mr. Julio Cesar Valentin Jiminian, *Vice-president of the Assembly*

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