

Short speech by Silvan Luley of DIGNITAS, at the press launch of Scottish Parliament MSP Margo Macdonald's revised Assisted Suicide (Scotland) Bill

14 November 2013 – Edinburgh

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Do you know the goal, the aim of DIGNITAS? The core goal of DIGNITAS is to vanish, to disappear, to close down. If other countries than Switzerland implement sensible possibilities for people to end their suffering self-determinedly in a safe and dignified manner, these people do not need DIGNITAS anymore. Margo Macdonald's Assisted Suicide (Scotland) Bill is in line with the goals of DIGNITAS and we strongly support it.

It is an atrocity that a severely suffering Scottish citizen has to leave his bed, his home, his country, in order to have access to the basic human right of a self-determined, dignified end of suffering and end of life. The European Court of Human Rights said in its decision 31322/07 dated 20 January 2011, case Haas vs. Switzerland: "The Court finds that the right of an individual to decide how and when to end his life, provided that said individual was in a position to make up his own mind in that respect and to take the appropriate action, was one aspect of the right to respect for private life under Article 8 of the Convention".

Some religious-conservative opponents of freedom of choice claim that there is no right to die. They are wrong, certainly so from a legal perspective.

In 2010, 781 Scots committed suicide; this the officially registered number. The total for the UK was 5,608 according to the Office for National Statistics. However, the suicide attempt and failure rate is considered to be up to 50 times higher which means that up to nearly 40,000 Scots attempt suicide every year. Having no other choice, they turn to methods such as jumping of high buildings or going in front of a train, etc. Risky, lonely suicide attempts out of despair, of which the vast majority fails. These people survive, but how? Usually with dire consequences for their health and their loved ones. Is this humane and dignified?

In order to avoid, at least reduce, the high number of tragic suicide attempts, it is indispensable that someone who for good reasons wishes to end his suffering, qualifying with the prerequisites set out in the Bill, has access to trained facilitators who make sure that everything in the last days of the individual happens in line with his or her wishes, safely, in the frame of the law. In Switzerland, we have 30 years of experience with such a scheme, with accompanied suicide, involving independent medical doctors and facilitators. Recently, the Government of the Canton of Zürich stated that DIGNITAS and also Exit work correctly and that there is no malpractice.