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Press release by

DIGNITAS – To live with dignity – To die with dignity

New UK Legal Case for Self-chosen and Dignified End of Life

DIGNITAS – To live with dignity – To die with dignity are pleased to see a new legal challenge to change the law in the UK for access to a self-determined, accompanied, dignified end of suffering and life. The case, initiated by Omid T, an incurably ill man with Multiple System Atrophy, is led by Ms Saimo Chahal QC (Hon), partner at the law firm Bindmans LLP in London. DIGNITAS encourages everyone to support and help to fund the action by Omid. This can be done, for example, through the following website:

<https://www.crowdjustice.org/case/dignified-death>

DIGNITAS – To live with dignity – To die with dignity are pleased to see the law firm Bindmans in London representing Omid, who suffers from the incurable illness Multiple System Atrophy (MSA). Omid is now largely confined to bed and needs help with all personal care. He has difficulty speaking, and has lost much control in his arms and hands, making him unable to end his life unaided, which would be very risky anyway; Omid attempted suicide once but failed, like so many others.

A wider and more sensible scope

Omid is not terminally ill, in the sense of having a short life expectancy of a few months or weeks. This is an important distinction to another legal challenge started in January by the lawyers of Noel Conway, whose claim is limited to seeking access to assisted dying for the terminally ill with a life expectancy of six months or less – which is the model of the narrow-scope US Assisted Dying Laws. DIGNITAS notes the importance of Mr. Conway's case. Allowing terminally-ill patients, with six months or less to live access to a dignified death is an important step forward to a humanitarian approach and protection of life and life's end. However, it is a very narrow framework, excluding a large number of severely ill individuals suffering from incurable conditions which render life intolerable. It would therefore not take care of the issue and may even constitute unlawful discrimination, which is in conflict with article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights. Besides, doctors know that it is hardly possible to accurately predict life expectancy several months ahead, which makes the prerequisite of a six month life expectancy something rather theoretical.

Omid's case is much more representative of the needs and wishes of the public and of DIGNITAS' objective: real freedom of choice from options such as palliative care, stopping further treatment, and a self-determined, accompanied, dignified end of suffering and life.

Support for Omid's case

DIGNITAS – To live with dignity – To die with dignity, just as the British Humanist Association, the UK right-to-die campaign organisation My Death My Decision and Scotland's Friends At The End, encourages everyone to support and help to fund the action by Omid. This can be done, for example, through the following website:

<https://www.crowdjustice.org/case/dignified-death>

The Bindmans legal team are very experienced as they also worked on the cases of Debbie Purdy and Tony Nicklinson. Counsel is Paul Bowen QC who worked on these cases too. In the case of Tony Nicklinson, Lord Neuberger said: *"There seems to me to be significantly more justification in assisting people to die if they have the prospect of living for many years a life that they regarded as valueless, miserable and often painful, than if they have only a few months left to live"*. Lord Neuberger is President of the Supreme Court, the final court of appeal in the UK for civil cases, and for criminal cases from England, Wales and Northern Ireland. DIGNITAS strongly agrees with his opinion that assisted dying should not be restricted on a life expectancy basis, most certainly not a short one. Why should people be forced to continue a life suffering against their will, and be denied physician's care and support to access medication which can give them the self-chosen end of their ordeal? Why should they be forced to leave their home and travel to DIGNITAS in Switzerland, a very difficult journey in their deplorable state of health, and this under the threat of police questionings and potential prosecution for their loved ones?

DIGNITAS – To live with dignity – To die with dignity wishes Omid strength and success in his legal challenge to allow what to him is a good end of life. The issue will not go away until people like Omid are allowed the human right and choice of a medically-supported, self-determined and accompanied end of suffering and life.

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BACKGROUND:

DIGNITAS – To live with dignity – To die with dignity was founded in May 1998 with the aim, to make the proven Swiss model of freedom of choice, self-determination and personal responsibility in life and at life's end also accessible for individuals abroad.

DIGNITAS' advisory concept – combining palliative care, suicide attempt prevention, advance directives/decisions and assisted dying – offers a basis for good decision-making to shape life until the end.

The non-profit member's society has 7,760 members in 84 countries around the world.

Through litigation, DIGNITAS obtained a judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in 2011, acknowledging the right/freedom of a competent individual to decide on time and manner of his or her own end in life, and confirming this to be protected by Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

DIGNITAS has been engaged in many more lawsuits in Europe and Canada, and has provided in-depth submissions and received visits by expert and parliamentary committees from Great Britain, Australia, Canada, etc. when laws were discussed and planned for the protection of a patient's autonomy and human dignity.

The founder of the charitable DIGNITAS organisation is Ludwig A. Minelli, an attorney-at-law specialising in human rights. The team of DIGNITAS consists of board members, twenty part-time employees and it is supported by several external experts in the fields of medicine and law.