

Catholic Church Urges Irish to Oppose Abortion Law

The head of Ireland's Catholic Church urged followers in his Christmas Day message to lobby against government plans to legalize abortion.

Ireland, the only EU member state that currently outlaws the procedure, is preparing legislation that would allow limited access to abortion after the European Court of Human Rights criticized the current regime.

The death last month of an Indian woman who was denied an **abortion** of her dying foetus and later died of blood poisoning has intensified the debate around abortion, which remains a hugely divisive subject in the predominantly Catholic country.

"I hope that everyone who believes that the right to life is fundamental will make their voice heard in a reasonable, but forthright, way to their representatives," Cardinal Sean Brady said in a Christmas message on Tuesday.

"No government has the right to remove that right from an innocent person."

Irish Prime Minister Enda Kenny, a regular Mass goer, is bringing in legislation that would allow a woman to have an abortion if her life was at risk from pregnancy.

The country's Supreme Court ruled in 1992 that **abortion** was permitted when a woman's life was at risk but successive governments have avoided legislating for it because it is so divisive.

The death of Savita Halappanavar, who repeatedly asked for an abortion while she was miscarrying in an Irish hospital, highlighted the lack of clarity in Irish law that leaves

doctors in a legally risky position.

Halappanavar's death re-ignited the **abortion debate** and prompted large protests by groups both in favor of and against abortion.

Kenny and his conservative Fine Gael party have been criticized for tackling the abortion issue and some party members have indicated that they may not be able to back the law.

Relations between the Irish government and the once dominant Catholic Church are at an all-time low in the wake of years of clerical sex abuse scandals.

Kenny told parliament last year that the Vatican's handling of the scandals had been dominated by "elitism and narcissism" and accused it of trying to cover up the abuse. The speech prompted the Vatican to recall its ambassador, or nuncio, to Ireland.

Brady, who has faced calls this year to resign over accusations he failed to warn parents their children were being sexually abused, said in his Christmas message that he wanted relations with government to improve.

"My hope is that the year ahead will see the relationship between faith and public life in our country move beyond the sometimes negative, exaggerated caricatures of the past."

Reporting by Carmel Crimmins; Editing by Sandra Maler

© 2012 Thomson Reuters. All rights reserved.