

PRESS RELEASE FROM ALERT AND DISTANT VOICES

Thursday 2nd May 2013

For immediate release:

Disability rights campaigner challenges Dignity in Dying chief to a public debate

A disability rights campaigner is challenging the head of a group fighting for the legalisation of assisted suicide to a public debate.

Nikki Kenward of Aston on Clun, Shropshire, has written an open letter to Sarah Wootton, the chief executive of Dignity in Dying, inviting her to speak together before a live audience.

Mrs Kenward, who was “locked-in” for almost a year following an attack of Guillan Barre syndrome in 1990 and who still uses a wheelchair, says in her letter that the campaign for assisted suicide may be putting the lives of disabled and other vulnerable people at risk, partly by generating “visceral fear and hatred of the unknown”. She argues that not a single organisation representing the disabled supports the abolition of laws forbidding assisted suicide.

If the law was changed, she predicted, the future would be “full of greedy relatives, dodgy doctors, grabbing insurance brokers, mealy-mouthed horrors of parliamentary rogues, whose present careless and ‘care-less’ attitude will bring children, old people and the vulnerable” to a premature death.

In her letter Mrs Kenward says: “I invite you to meet with me - I suggest a public debate, me, you, and maybe one or two of my ‘supporters’, instead of yours, just for a change. Prove to me that your blue world exists and that I am just one of those disabled people cynical with the world and closed to the kindness you offer me. Go on, talk to me, Sarah, talk to us. We could be ‘dying’ to listen.”

The open letter in full continues below

For further information

Please contact either **Nikki Kenward** of Distant Voices on 01588 660528, email: nikkikenward@gmail.com, or **Elsbeth Chowdharay-Best** of ALERT on 020 7730 2800.

Nikki’s story can be read here: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2019171/Dignitas-No-right-switch-human-life.html>

Website: www.alertuk.org

The open letter in full:

**OPEN LETTER TO SARAH WOOTTON,
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF DIGNITY IN DYING**

A meme is "an idea, behaviour, or style that spreads from person to person within a culture".

Sarah, I would like to begin by asking a simple question. Is your world full of lovely, caring, sensible people who only want the best for others and see, in that glistening blue sky, that is their future, a sure and meaningful death should they ever succumb to terminal or disabling illness? In your recent publication you state that "80 per cent of the British population" support euthanasia (although you seem strangely reticent to use the term too often).

So that's 80 per cent saying they don't want to be disabled, they would rather be dead than be me. You're hooking in to people's worst fears and using them for a campaign that will generate only more hatred and visceral fear of the unknown. We who live with disability every day have first-hand knowledge of such attitudes and it is even more significant that you fail to notice that not one organisation for "us" has backed your campaign. Doesn't that say something to you?

Despite saying that you only work for those with a terminal illness you've been quick enough to take up people who are not imminently facing death, such as the Deborah Purdys and, heaven forbid, the Christopher Woodheads of this world, who are ready to be your groupies, whatever the cost to the rest of us. Think deeply, Ms Wootton you are creating a meme, an idea, a practice, that people like them, will, in their last sad days, lick around you for. They fail to realise that the lick contains a future full of greedy relatives, dodgy doctors, grabbing insurance brokers, mealy mouthed horrors of parliamentary rogues, whose present careless and care - less attitude will bring children, old people and the vulnerable to your door.

So, before you open your door I invite you to meet with me, I suggest a public debate, me, you, and maybe one or two of my "supporters", instead of yours, just for a change. Prove to me that your blue world exists and that I am just one of those disabled people cynical with the world and closed to the kindness you offer me. Go on talk to me Sarah, talk to us. We could be "dying" to listen.

Nikki Kenward

Notes to Editors:

ALERT aims to warn people of the dangers of any type of euthanasia legislation and pro-death initiatives. These have included the promotions of living wills and advance directives, which create a climate for the acceptance of euthanasia.

ALERT was founded in December 1991 to provide well-documented information on these and related issues, and to defend the lives and rights of the medically vulnerable, recognising that all human beings are of equal value.

ALERT defines euthanasia as “any action or omission which is intended to end the life of a patient”. The law in every country until recent years protected all citizens against being killed, regardless of their status or condition and the first infamous exception to this rule was in Nazi Germany. Such laws change the attitude of society towards its members.

It has never been part of doctors’ duty to prolong the dying process by extraordinary interventions. But they should never deliberately harm those in their care. ALERT is calling for the restoration of the law against homicide, which has served our citizens well for centuries.

ALERT is a campaigning organisation, not a charity, and is funded solely by donations from our supporters.

Distant Voices was launched in 2009 with a declaration about the human rights of disabled people, read by Nikki Kenward the Fourth Plinth in Trafalgar Square, London, during Anthony Gormley’s rolling display of art.

Distant Voices campaigns against euthanasia using a variety of creative media, including art, sculpture, music, demonstrations, flash mobbing, photography

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