



DECR chairman's statement on the fate of ten-month-old Charlie Gard from Great Britain

All courts, including the European Court of Human Rights, passed a death sentence on a child suffering from a rare genetic condition and did not heed his parents' plea to give him a chance. Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations, commented on the situation in his statement.

A great many people all over the world remain deeply concerned over the fate of ten-month-old Charlie Gard from Great Britain who is suffering from a rare genetic condition. According to the English doctors, the child is in the "terminal stages" and nothing can be done to help him. Medics at the Great Ormond Street Hospital believe it is necessary to switch off the child's ventilator and provide him palliative care so that he can "die with dignity."

His parents explored the options of alternative treatment. The American doctors are ready to receive the child and give him a course of experimental therapy which had positive results with other infant patients and helped relieve the symptoms. People showed sympathy and raised over £1.3 million to pay for Charlie's treatment in the USA. However, the Great Ormond Street Hospital went to court to decide the child's fate.

The problem of the so-called "passive euthanasia" arose as a result of progress in medical technologies which allow to sustain respiration and blood circulation in a patient for many years in the hope of recovery. Earlier the irreversible respiratory and circulatory arrest was considered as a criterion of death. However, nowadays the act of death is becoming the process of dying, dependent on a doctor's decision, thus laying special responsibility on medicine. The daily cost of intensive care unit is high. Hospitals' resources for keeping people alive are limited, taking into consideration that new patients with severe medical condition are coming in and there not enough facilities for everyone.

However, in Charlie Gard's case, there are doctors in the USA who are ready to give him treatment, and there are funds. Despite all this, the court made the decision that it is in "Charlie's best interests" to turn off his life support machine, to provide him palliative care and let him "die with dignity."

The modern Western civilization postulates that human life is the absolute value; yet, in many countries, taking life of gravely ill people, including children, is becoming a legalized practice.

What aggravates this tragic situation is that parents cannot make their own decision. Why does it

happen that a family living in a free democratic country in the 21st century gets locked within one clinic because of the court's decision and cannot use other clinic's services? Why does it happen that parents are deprived of the right to fight for their baby's life by any means they have and cannot make their own decisions concerning their child's treatment? It is an act of violence against the parents' conscience, an act of harassment against them, sadism in humanitarian disguise.

The dreadful decision of the European Court of Human Rights indicated the deepest crisis of the very concept of human rights protection. The right to life is giving way to the right to death.

It is my hope that Charlie Gard's parents will have an opportunity to give their child such treatment as they deem correct. I pray that they have strength to endure this terrible ordeal, and believe that the merciful Lord will not deprive little Charlie of His love and will turn his sufferings into the pledge of the life eternal.

DECR Communication Service

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