News
Supporters of anti-abortion organizations protest outside the Constitutional Court in Madrid S

Supporters of anti-abortion organizations protest outside the Constitutional Court in Madrid Sept. 28, 2021. The banners read "Justice for unborn babies" and "I want to live." (CNS photo/Susana Vera, Reuters)



by Catholic News Service

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Madrid — October 1, 2021
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Spain's Catholic bishops condemned government-backed legislation to criminalize prayers and protests outside abortion clinics, as well as plans for a register of doctors refusing to carry out abortions.

"The right to freedom of expression and protest must be recognized," said Auxiliary Bishop Luis Argüello Garcia of Valladolid, secretary-general of the bishops' conference.

"People who pray around these clinics do so at their own initiative, remembering the sacred dignity of human life and offering information on alternatives to abortion. It's worrying that preventing life is considered a sign of progress, whereas opposing abortion is seen as ultra-conservative," he told a news conference Sept. 30, as the government pressed ahead with plans to tighten Spain's abortion law by criminalizing actions outside clinics.

He added, "If a right to abortion is legally recognized, the right to freedom of expression and to demonstrate must also be recognized, along with the possibility to

impart information."

The bill would prescribe up to a year's jail or community service for "publicly deriding women." A Socialist Party sponsor, Laura Berja, told legislators that "insulting women and calling them murderers" was "not freedom of expression, but criminal coercion."

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Church leaders have also criticized plans by Equality Minister Irene Montero to create a register of doctors conscientiously objecting to carrying out abortions.

In a late-September statement, the director of Spain's Family Forum, Javier Rodriguez, said the register would create "new mechanisms to persecute and silence dissidents" and force health professionals "to act not only against their beliefs and values, but also against their code of ethics."

Meanwhile, the Madrid College of Physicians warned Sept. 26 the measure would "muzzle those thinking differently" and alter "the entire system of liberties," adding that it risked violating the 1950 European Convention on Human Rights.

Spain's Catholic Alfa y Omega weekly said Oct. 1 pressure also was growing to bar conscientious objection so doctors could opt out of performing euthanasia. The paper said "media attempts to create a climate of opinion" against conscientious objection had already led to "very unpleasant situations for objectors."

Speaking after a two-day meeting of the Spanish bishops' conference Permanent Council, Bishop Argüello urged medical organizations to oppose moves that would "affect the right to freedom of conscience."

"This is an age when there is so much talk of data protection, of respecting each person's conscience and freedom," he told the Madrid news conference.

"If the argument for creating this register is to organize these provisions better, why are those willing to perform abortion or euthanasia not being registered?"

The Catholic Church makes up 62% of Spain's 47 million inhabitants, according to 2020 data, and has also criticized government-backed legislation facilitating same-sex marriage, secularized education and state-funded euthanasia.

A draft "Trans Law," enabling people over age 16 to re-register their gender through a court declaration without medical or legal procedures was also approved for enactment in June, while a "Statute of Secularism," enforcing "strict separation between politics and religion, law and morality, crime and sin," is set for adoption in October.