

RIGHT TO DIE

~By A.K Abubakar

The Right to Die is a concept based on the opinion that a human being is entitled to end his or her life or undergo voluntary euthanasia. Possession of this right is often understood that a person with a terminal illness, or without the will to continue living, should be allowed to end their own life, use assisted suicide, or to decline life-prolonging treatment. However for the sake of this work, it is the writer's opinion that individuals have the right to die as it typically associates the right to die with the idea that one's body and one's life are one's own, to dispose as one sees fit.

The right to self-determination and of others emerged and questions the definition of quality and sanctity of life; if one had the right to live, then the right to die must follow suit. The right to die of individuals should be considered because if one had a right to live, then one must have the right to die, both on their terms, death itself is a natural process of life thus there should not be any laws to prevent it if the patient seeks to end it. Individuals should have the right to die because the end of our lives should not be of concern to others.

There are questions as to whether or not a right to die can coexist with a right to life. It is always argued that the right to life is inalienable, it cannot be surrendered, and therefore may be incompatible with a right to die; However if right to die is legalised or euthanasia is strictly controlled, we can avoid entering a slippery slope and prevent patients from seeking alternative methods which may not be legal.

A court in the American state of Montana for example, has found that the right to die applies to those with life-threatening medical conditions, however it is the writer's opinion that all competent people have a right to end their own lives. It is a test for the overall freedom of a given society.

MAJOR RIGHT TO DIE CASES

Karen Quinlan

The right to die movement in the US began with the case of Karen Quinlan in 1975 and continues to raise bioethical questions of one's quality of life and the legal process of death. Karen Quinlan, 21, lost consciousness after consuming alcohol and tranquilizers at a party; she soon began to experience respiratory problems which then prevented oxygen from flowing to her brain. This left her to slip into a comatose state in which a respirator and a feeding tube were used to keep her alive and breathing.

Quinlan did not have a proxy or living will, and had not expressed her wishes if

something ever happened to her to those around her, which made it difficult to decide what the next step should be.

Karen Quinlan's parents understood that their daughter would never wake up and that prolonging her life may be more damaging and it would not be of quality life. Karen's father sought out the right to be Karen's legal guardian and petitioned for the removal of the respirator that was keeping her alive. The court however argued that the removal of the ventilator which would lead to Karen's death would be considered unlawful, unnatural, and unethical, but the Quinlans argued that their daughter is in a deteriorating state and as such has the right to die by assisted suicide, after much arguments, the Quinlans won the court case and were appointed as the legal guardian of their daughter. The respirator was removed in 1976, but Karen continued to live without the ventilator until 1985.

This case continues to raise the bioethical questions of one's quality of life and the legal process of death. Since 1994, five states in the US have passed the right to die and assisted suicide Laws. Hinduism accepts the right to die for those who are tormented by terminal diseases or those who have no desire, no ambition or no responsibilities remaining.

The decision about whether to continue living in such conditions is among the most important that can be made. Just as people value having control over where to live, which occupation to pursue, whom to marry, and whether to have children, so people value having control over whether to continue living when quality of life deteriorates. That is why the right to life and the right to die are not two rights, but two aspects or descriptions of the same right. The right to life is the right to decide whether one will or will not continue living. The right to die is the right to decide whether one will die (when one could continue living). To this end the right to die should be given serious consideration and should be permitted in all nations of the world.

However, it is the writer's opinion that to be forced to continue living a life that one deems intolerable when there are doctors who are willing either to end one's life or to assist one in ending one's own life is an unspeakable violation of an individual's freedom to live and to die as he or she sees fit.

Conclusively, opponents of a legal right to die are fond of saying that freedom has its limits. However, just because freedom has its limits does not mean that a right to die falls beyond those limits. When a person deems that life is no longer worth living, then taking action to prevent that person from gaining assistance to die imposes a very serious harm. Although society may restrict a person's freedom to prevent the infliction of harm on others, it's very difficult to justify restricting a person's freedom when that restriction will result in an immense personal harm.