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# BACKGROUND PAPER

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**Topic:** “Human rights implications of euthanasia and assisted suicide ”

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**Human Rights Council**

**Chair and Moderator names**

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# INDEX

<b>Committee Background</b>	<b>03</b>
<b>Introduction of the Topic</b>	<b>04</b>
<b>Evolution of the Topic</b>	<b>05</b>
<b>External Actions</b>	<b>06</b>
<b>Committee Focus</b>	<b>07</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>08</b>
<b>Countries Position</b>	<b>09</b>
<b>Participation List</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>13</b>



# Committee Background

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The Human Rights Council is the main intergovernmental body within the United Nations responsible for human rights. Established in 2006 by the General Assembly, it is responsible for strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights around the globe.

The Council, composed of 47 Member States, provides a multilateral forum to address human rights violations and country situations. It responds to human rights emergencies and makes recommendations on how to better implement human rights on the ground. Adopts resolutions or decisions during regular sessions that express the will of the international community on given human rights issues or situations.

# Introduction of the Topic

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Euthanasia and assisted suicide, often referred to as medical aid in dying (MAID), present complex human rights challenges for the Human Rights Council. The central dilemma involves balancing respect for individual autonomy and dignity with states' legal obligations to protect the right to life, equality, and non-discrimination. While ethical debates focus on whether assisted dying can be justified as a response to severe suffering, the legal debate centers on whether such practices can be regulated without violating international human rights law.

The United Nations has not recognized a right to die under international human rights law. UN bodies have consistently stated that disability, age, or illness alone can never justify access to assisted dying. The Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities has warned that social prejudice may lead to the devaluation of certain lives, making strong safeguards essential to prevent discrimination, coercion, or undue influence.

Accordingly, states considering assisted dying legislation must ensure access to palliative care and adopt strict legal protections that uphold the equal value and dignity of every person.



# Evolution of the Topic

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After the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights were created, the right to life became a key part of international law. Euthanasia and assisted suicide were illegal in almost every country until the mid-20th century. Things started to change around the early 2000s when the Netherlands and Belgium became the first UN countries to pass laws allowing them under strict rules, which other countries then looked to.

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UN groups began to deal with the issue through health and human rights. In 2014, the World Health Assembly asked countries to include palliative care in their health systems, which now is a big part of the global discussion on end-of-life decisions. Also, courts like the European Court of Human Rights made it clear that the international law does not recognize an explicit right to die.

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From 2016, some UN countries, like Canada, introduced nationwide systems that made more people eligible for medical assistance in dying within a certain framework. These laws led to investigations by UN experts, who emphasized that disability or old age should never be a valid reason to have access to assisted dying.

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Current talks in the Human Rights Council show that this issue is not resolved worldwide. Only a few countries have legalized euthanasia or assisted suicide. Most still ban it but are working to improve palliative care.

# External Actions

External actions on euthanasia and assisted suicide have been primarily led by international organizations and human rights mechanisms rather than direct state intervention. The United Nations has consistently affirmed that international human rights law does not recognize a right to die, emphasizing state obligations to protect the right to life under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

UN Special Rapporteurs, particularly on the rights of persons with disabilities and on extrajudicial executions, have externally influenced state policies by warning that assisted dying laws may expose vulnerable groups to discrimination, coercion, or social pressure. These expert statements have shaped international debate and encouraged cautious legislative approaches.

In parallel, the World Health Organization has promoted palliative care as a human rights-based response to end-of-life suffering. Through World Health Assembly resolutions, the WHO has urged states to expand access to pain management and palliative services, reinforcing alternatives to euthanasia and assisted suicide.

Additionally, international human rights organizations and medical advocacy groups have contributed by monitoring legislation, documenting concerns, and supporting affected individuals, helping sustain global attention on the human rights implications of assisted dying.





# Committee Focus

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The Human Rights Council (HRC) looks at the human rights issues of euthanasia and assisted suicide, balancing personal choice and dignity with the need to protect life, equality, and not discriminate.

The Human Rights Council deals with euthanasia and assisted suicide by balancing choice with the right to life, ensuring equality and no discrimination, and pushing for strong rules and oversight. It puts stress on palliative care, respects differences in culture and religion, and clarifies international legal standards.

Talking points:

- \* Choice and dignity at the end of life
- \* Right to life as a key right
- \* Protection against discrimination and pressure
- \* Palliative care and human rights
- \* Culture, ethics, and religion in making policy
- \* International laws and changing standards



# Conclusion

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The global conversation on euthanasia and assisted suicide marks a big shift in human rights. It shows the tension between protecting life and respecting personal choice. After being banned for so long, assisted dying is now legal in some places, which has caused disagreement. Some countries see it as a matter of dignity and choice, while others think it threatens life and puts vulnerable people at risk. This discussion is very important. It reflects the struggle to define what power the government has over people's decisions, the duty to protect equality, and the moral force of culture and religion.

The issue also brings up the humanitarian side, as worse suffering and inequality can come from not enough palliative care. Talking about this lets people think about human dignity, the risks of discrimination, and how to balance universal rights with different ethical views. The ongoing discussion within the Human Rights Council shows that collaboration and working toward agreement is important.



# Countries Position

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**Netherlands** – first to legalize euthanasia (2002).

**Belgium** – broad framework, including minors in rare cases.

**Canada** – nationwide MAID law since 2016.

**Spain** – legalized in 2021.

**Portugal** – legalized in 2023.

**Colombia** – Constitutional Court rulings since 1997, expanded in 2015.

**New Zealand** – legalized via referendum in 2021.

**Australia** – all six states have legalized euthanasia.

**Switzerland** – assisted suicide legal since 1942 (non-profit motive).

**United States** – only some states allow it; federal opposition remains.

**United Kingdom** – Parliament repeatedly rejected legalization.

**France** – ongoing debate, but still restrictive.

**Germany** – Constitutional Court allowed assisted suicide, but legislation remains contested

**Italy** – Constitutional Court rulings allow limited exceptions, but Parliament resists full legalization.

**Mexico** – euthanasia illegal, though assisted suicide allowed in Mexico City under strict conditions.

**Brazil** – firmly opposed, strong religious influence.

**Russia** – strongly opposed, emphasizes right to life.

**China** – opposes legalization, prioritizes social stability.

**Saudi Arabia** – firmly opposed, religious grounds.

**India** – passive euthanasia allowed under strict conditions, but active euthanasia banned.

**South Africa** – courts have debated, but no legalization yet.

# Participation List

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Netherlands



Belgium



Canada



Spain



Portugal



Colombia



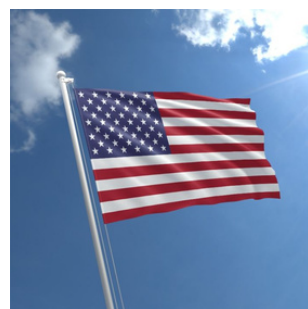
New Zealand



Australia



Switzerland



USA



United Kingdom



France

# Participation List

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Germany



Italy



Mexico



Brazil



Russia



China



Saudi Arabia



India



South Africa



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