



PRESS RELEASE

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Declaration by the German National Ethics Council concerning the petition by the Association of Victims of “Euthanasia” and Forced Sterilization on the Nazi “Genetic Health Law”

The National Ethics Council issued the following declaration at its meeting of 24 November 2005:

In January 2004 the Bund der “Euthanasie”-Geschädigten und Zwangssterilisierten e. V. [the Association of Victims of “Euthanasia” and Forced Sterilization] petitioned the Bundestag [the Lower House of the German Parliament] to declare explicitly that the so-called Genetic Health Law of 1933 was void from the outset, and to this end requested the support of the National Ethics Council in 2005.

The “Genetic Health Law” and its application raise questions of the dignity of the individual and respect for the person, as well as fundamental principles of the relationship between the state and the individual. The National Ethics Council considers that both of these aspects are still particularly relevant today in connection with the life sciences, for instance in the sphere of eugenics.

During the period of the brutal Nazi regime some 350 000 men and women were humiliated and profoundly wounded in their human dignity by forced sterilization and related measures. The justification adduced for these measures was the “Genetic Health Law”.

This law was formally repealed in 1974. The sterilization decisions of the Nazi Genetic Health Courts were revoked by the passing of a specific law in 1998. As long ago as in 1988 the Bundestag proclaimed in a resolution that “the forced sterilizations carried out on the basis of the so-called Genetic Health Law in the period 1933 to 1945 represented National Socialist injustice”; however, it condemned only these measures, but not the Law itself, as an “expression of the inhuman National Socialist conception of ‘life not worthy of living’”. In adopting this resolution, the Bundestag was guided by the conviction that the forcible elimination of the capacity for procreation constituted an impermissible interference with bodily integrity and amounted to a grave infringement of human dignity.

The German National Ethics Council

The German National Ethics Council's task is to provide a forum for interdisciplinary discourse between the natural sciences, medicine, theology and philosophy, and the social and legal sciences.

It expresses views on ethical issues relating to new developments in the field of the life sciences and on their consequences for the individual and society.

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The National Ethics Council shares this assessment and would welcome action by the Bundestag to accede to the request by the Association of Victims of “Euthanasia” and Forced Sterilization in extending its judgement of the measures taken under the Law to the Law itself as well as to any such legal and regulatory provisions.

