

Statement of Cardinal Renato Martino,
President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace
Vatican City
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The courts have ruled again and again. Unfortunately, the deadline for the removal of the tube delivering food and water to Terri Schiavo is quickly approaching. I am sorry to have to use the word “deadline” but this is the most accurate way to describe what will happen. Without the tube which is providing life-giving hydration and nutrition, Terri Schiavo will die. But it is not that simple. She will die a horrible and cruel death. She will not simply die, she will have death inflicted upon her over a number of terrible days even weeks. How can anyone who claims to speak of the promotion and protection of human rights-of human life- remain silent? Is this not a question of the right to life? I believe that I must speak out about this in the same way that I would speak of the protection of the unborn and just as I would concerning any injustice .

Has due process in this case been truly served? Have all options been employed? Where is love? Where is human compassion? No one would ever wish to witness the suffering of another, especially a loved one. And I am sure that no one could ever choose to witness suffering or a cruel death being inflicted upon another, especially one who is loved. How then have we come to this point?

If it is true that the process has been fair and that all legal avenues have been exhausted, how is it that this woman, who has done nothing wrong, will suffer a fate which society would never tolerate in the case of a convicted murderer or anyone else convicted of the most horrendous crimes? Again, it is an issue of human rights. It is an issue of the right to life, and as I stated earlier, no one can be the arbiter of life except God himself!

The State of Florida has many laws on its books which protect animals, whether they be household pets, domesticated farm animals or animals destined for slaughter. (And please pardon me as I make this analogy. I am not comparing Terri to an animal. I only want to show the protection that the courts afford to animals in the State of Florida.) These laws “prohibit[s] anyone from intentionally committing an act to any animal which results in cruel death, or excessive or repeated infliction of unnecessary pain or suffering” (828.12). It is also unlawful to keep an animal in a place while failing to supply “a sufficient quantity of good and wholesome food and water”(828.13).

Are these laws not enforced by the same courts, are these not the same laws established by lawmakers in order to protect other creatures of God?

However, in just a few days, [if her husband and the courts have their way,]this is exactly what will happen to Terri. She will be completely deprived of water and food. She will have excessive suffering and pain inflicted upon her which will lead to her cruel death. Yet we have come to the point of asking whether due process been fully carried out and all options exhausted on behalf of Terri? This is unbelievable! Is it not sufficient enough to say that there are still questions that must be answered? We plead, we make the urgent appeal for the life of a helpless human being...a person with whom we all share our God given human dignity. How can anyone say that her best interests have been taken into consideration?

In his *Message for the Eleventh World Day of the Sick* (11 February 2003) His Holiness Pope John Paul II stated: “And while palliative treatment in the final stage of life can be encouraged, avoiding a “treatment at all costs” mentality, it will never be permissible to resort to

actions or omissions which by their nature or in the intention of the person acting are designed to bring about death.”

Palliative care, by its definition is the alleviation of suffering and relieving pain. In the last stage of life, it is this care for which we all must hope because, if the feeding tube is removed and Terri is forced to die this slow, terrible, painful death, we must ask ourselves, “And who will be next?” Will this open the door for a state to decide whether this or that incapacitated person should die...not be allowed to die a dignified death but that they should have death inflicted upon them?

It must stop here and now. The courts, the judges and everyone involved with this must understand that all of the questions involved in the case of Terri Schiavo have not yet been answered. Society must realize that we can never inflict this sort of death on a human being, on any other creature, without each and every one of us and society as a whole suffering a terrible fate.