Help me out. The right to die through assisted suicide.

Hello delegates. My name is Niki Saberi and first of all I would like to say a very warm welcome to all those attending the GWC MUN conference 2017. I will be chairing the Human Rights 2 Committee with my co-chair Ethan Stewart. This is my first year being a chair of a committee and I hope it will be an amazing experience to look back on with many things learnt and many new friends made. If this is your first time here as well don’t worry because we are all in this together! MUN is an amazing opportunity to build both your confidence and leadership skills but also to extend your knowledge about the wider world. I am very passionate and interested in this particular area and topic which I hope will spark a fascinating and engaging debate but most of all don’t be afraid to speak up and have fun!

Introduction:
“Euthanasia” is the act of putting to death painlessly or allowing to die, as by withholding extreme medical measures, a person or animal suffering from an incurable, especially a painful, disease or condition. It is translated into “good or happy death” in Greek and now in more modern terms known as a mercy killing. The dramatic development of medical technology and research has brought to light a controversial topic that suggests that is there a right for an individual to take away an extremely ill person’s life in order to relieve them from the suffering the illness is causing? Some people argue that this right should be up to the patient themselves however on the other hand this right can be misused which may result in disturbing situations which leads to the question that is there a moral difference between killing someone and letting them die?

International standing of Euthanasia:

The Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg permit euthanasia and assisted suicide. Switzerland permits assisted suicide if the person assisting acts unselfishly. Colombia permits euthanasia. California has just joined the US states of Oregon, Washington, Vermont and Montana in permitting assisted dying and Canada permitted euthanasia and assisted suicide from February 2016 (slightly earlier in the province of Quebec). The rest of the world punishes assistance in suicide. However, attempting to kill yourself is not a criminal act in itself. The Netherlands were the first to implement legislation legalising assisted suicide and euthanasia in 2002. Alongside this they also imposed strict rules and conditions for these actions to be deemed correct, the patient must be suffering from an incurable disease and unbearable pain and the approval must be made in “full consciousness”. Before
such changes in some countries’ laws, many people broke the law of illegal euthanasia after their appeal was rejected by their countries’ highest court. For example, in 1994, Sue Rodriguez, a terminally ill lawyer who fought to have a legal right to assisted suicide had her final appeal being rejected by the Canadian Supreme Court. Afterwards, she ended her life with the support of an unknown doctor despite the Court’s decision. Many people would argue that it was high profile campaigns such as that of Sue Rodriguez that in the long run helped to change the law.

**Different types of Euthanasia:**

When referring to Euthanasia, there are various categories that euthanasia is split up into.

**Active Euthanasia** is where a person deliberately intervenes to end someone’s life. An example of this is giving someone lethal injection or medication.

**Passive Euthanasia** is where a person causes someone’s death by withholding treatment that is necessary to support and maintain life for instance life support or necessary provisions. So-called palliative sedation has become a widespread practice in hospitals, "with 15,000 cases a year since 2005, according to the Royal Dutch Medical Association." When patients with a life expectancy of less than two weeks are put in a medically induced coma, and all support for life such as hydration and nutrition is withdrawn.

**Voluntary euthanasia** is when the person concerned asks someone to help them die, perhaps by asking for help to take an overdose of painkillers. They might ask for life support machines to be switched off or refuse to eat. This can also be referred to as physician-assisted suicide which has been practiced legally in US state of Oregon since 1994, and in Switzerland, Belgium and the Netherlands. A recent example of this is a pair of identical twins requesting to be euthanised by lethal injection as they would eventually go blind and couldn’t bear the thought of never seeing each other again. This was a very controversial case under Belgian laws as neither of the patients were suffering from extreme physical pain or had a terminal illness.

**Non-voluntary euthanasia** is when a person cannot make a decision or cannot make their wishes known. This includes cases where the person is in a coma or too young or senile.
• **Involuntary euthanasia** occurs when euthanasia is performed on a person who would be able to provide informed consent, but does not, either because they do not want to die, or because they were not asked. This would be considered as murder, but not always. For example. A soldier has their stomach blown open by a shell burst. They are in great pain and screaming in agony. They beg the army doctor to save their life. The doctor knows that they will die in ten minutes whatever happens. As he has no painkilling drugs with him he decides to spare the soldier further pain and shoots them dead.

**Advantages of Euthanasia:**

Arguments that back up the use of Euthanasia are that this is the only method that will give relief to patients with terminal illnesses and those who suffer the pain caused by their ailments and those who would rather die instead of live the rest of their lives in pain and suffering. It should be granted to those people who feel they have “completed life” and are unable to enjoy and value life. Euthanasia is the cure for their suffering. It is also the most humane and benevolent way to end one’s anguish. One of the main ethical arguments is that everyone has the right to live, to control their own body and to decide at which manner and at which circumstance they will die. As the right to life, guarantees an individual the right to be killed without permission. Proponents of euthanasia agree that reverence to this right will prevent it from being misused as killing an individual without their consent would be classed as both murder and a violation of their human rights. Euthanasia will only be deemed morally correct when the consent to euthanasia is given in full awareness of the patient. Furthermore, many people fear dying without dignity and fear of being helpless and reliant on other humans which sparks the question that do we not as humans have an intrinsic right to die?

**Disadvantages of Euthanasia:**

A strong ethical argument against euthanasia is that it would eventually lead to a slippery slope to legalized murder. It is virtually impossible to know that the act of euthanasia was fully voluntary which would result in it being intractable. Involuntary euthanasia could be misused by doctors as they might use it as a solution to free up beds and resources in hospitals. Furthermore, many people have argued that if voluntary euthanasia was legalised, this would strengthen non-voluntary euthanasia which would substantially lead to the murder of innocent patients. Also, euthanasia may be unnecessary when proper palliative
care is available and may be shortly obtainable due to the fast advances in medical technology and research. It has been said by the World Health Organisation that “palliative care affirms life and regards dying as a normal process; it neither hastens nor postpones death; it provides relief from pain and suffering; it integrates the psychological and spiritual aspects of the patient.” Therefore, euthanasia is not an accurate cure but it represents the doctor's futile solution to the patient's illness. Which leads on to it violating the Hippocratic Oath of physicians which states that, “I will neither give a deadly drug to anybody if asked for it, nor will I make a suggestion to this effect”. Therefore, euthanasia is practically going against the whole purpose of the Hippocratic Oath and obligations and conducts of doctors.

Your Turn:

I hope this Briefing Paper has been useful to you and now it’s your turn. If you want to be considered for an award you must submit a Position Paper for your country. This is a concise account essentially around 50 words outlining your country's view on each of the four topics up for debate in this committee. The deadline for this submission is **Friday 24 February 2017** Position Papers on Euthanasia should be sent to me at n saberioskouri@gwc.org.uk. Please don’t hesitate to email me with your questions and queries. See you all in March!

To find out more about this issue:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/euthanasia/

http://nlcap.org/top-8-euthanasia-pros-and-cons/

https://www.care.org.uk/our-causes/sanctity-life/euthanasia

For Country Profiles and lots of other useful information:

http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/country_profiles/default.stm

For issues of current international debate:

http://www.newint.org/

http://www.idebate.org/
http://www.amnesty.org/