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The Society for Old Age Rational Suicide was established in Brighton and Hove (a city on the south coast of England), by several right-to-die activists and humanists, in 2009 on December 10, which is observed internationally as Human Rights Day (as the UN Declaration of Human Rights was adopted on December 10, 1948).

The main long-term objective of SOARS is to get the law eventually changed in the UK so that very elderly, mentally competent individuals, who are suffering unbearably from various health problems (although none of them is “terminal”) are allowed to receive a doctor’s assistance to die, if this is their persistent choice. Surely the decision to decide, at an advanced age, that enough is enough and, avoiding further suffering, to have a dignified death is the ultimate human right for a very elderly person.

Doctor-assisted suicide for terminally-ill individuals, with adequate safeguards, is possible today in four European countries and in two of the American States. Although there is much public support for this to become lawful in the UK, it is unlikely that Parliament (either at Westminster or in Edinburgh) will change the law, to help those who are terminally ill, for at least five to ten years.

But, besides those who are terminally ill (which, in today’s medical-legal terms, means someone who is expected to die within six months), there are many very elderly, competent individuals who, experiencing increasing physical and psychological suffering, get to the last years of their natural lives and have to seriously consider whether departing this existence will be much more attractive than struggling on. After eight or nine decades, many people rightly decide that their lives have been fully lived, and now they have a life which, for them, has finally become too long.

SOARS strongly believes that there are many competent, very elderly people who would also like the option of a legalized doctor-assisted suicide. Furthermore, in an ageing population, this number will increase: in 2010, there were 1.3 million people over 85 in the UK, and, by 2020, there will be at least two million. Of course, the opponents of doctor-assisted suicide, even for the terminally ill, will be strongly opposed, stating that this would be a “slippery slope”. Which, technically, would be true. But, SOARS hopes that the subject can be openly discussed now, with many considering what they might possibly want for themselves when they become very elderly. And, of course, nothing could become lawful without Parliamentary approval - it must be a truly democratic development.

Presently, the main activities of SOARS are to determine the degree of public support, in the UK, for old age rational suicide by commissioning opinion polls periodically; to promote the wider acceptance and use of Living Wills (now, legally called Advance Decisions); to hold public meetings (in particular, an Annual SOARS Lecture); and to assist those, among its supporters, who would qualify to travel to Switzerland for a doctor-assisted suicide in that country.

Of course, for a new law that would allow mentally competent, very elderly individuals who sincerely believe that they have lived a completed life, whose bodies are now severely failing them, to have a rational suicide with the assistance of a compassionate, understanding doctor, it would be essential to have strict procedures in place - such as:

- \* Two doctors (one being a consultant geriatrician) certifying that the individual is mentally competent, and had extensively considered all possible options.

- \* Every elderly person requesting a doctor-assisted suicide being interviewed by an official, independent legal witness, experienced in family matters, to ensure that they are acting on their own free will and are not being pressured by relatives or friends.

- \* There would be a two-month waiting period between a request for suicide being made and the necessary medication being provided (for this to be taken in the presence of a doctor. It is very important to stress that a doctor must be involved: if not, if only an unqualified relative or friend assists in a suicide, there is a great danger that mistakes will occur).

- \* And, detailed reporting to a central government office, by all those involved, would be necessary.

Finally, a few words about our use of "Suicide" in the title of our organization. Traditionally, many shy away from this word. But, in SOARS, we also want to stress the word "Rational". Antagonism to "suicide" dates back largely to previous centuries when religious forces decided that this act was sinful. We want to reclaim it now as being a rational and positive act when a mentally competent, very elderly individual has carefully considered the main pros and cons for wanting to stay alive. When someone in their late 80s or 90s, who is suffering unbearably, has a

doctor-assisted rational suicide, it should make sensible people think not why did that individual do this, but why did they not.

(Our logo shows the derelict West Pier at Brighton, once a place of great excitement and pleasure)