

Local

Doctors ask PM to act on abortion

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DOCTORS including the inventor of the bionic ear, Graeme Clark, have called on Kevin Rudd to intervene to stop Victoria's proposed abortion reforms, claiming they breach human rights and an international treaty.

The group, Doctors in Conscience Against Abortion Bill, says it has legal advice that the bill is in conflict with Victoria's Charter of Rights and Responsibilities and the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights.

The group has written to the Prime Minister saying that, if passed, the bill will coerce doctors into the taking of human life against their ethical, religious and cultural beliefs.

The legal opinion by former Federal Court judge Neil Young QC finds that if the bill becomes law, it will put the federal Government in breach of its treaty obligation.

``The Australian Government has an obligation to ensure Australia's laws are consistent with the charter, and we call upon Mr Rudd to intervene with Victorian Premier John Brumby and insist that Victoria not proceed with this legislation," group spokeswoman Mary Lewis said.

``The bill is unprecedented in the Western world, in imposing laws that would force doctors to act in violation of their conscientious beliefs by actively assisting patients to obtain an abortion."

Mr Rudd, who voted in federal parliament for the introduction of the abortion drug RU486, refused to comment yesterday beyond saying the bill was a matter for the Victorian parliament to decide.

``For me ... the life of the unborn is of great importance, and having tested these reasons with men and women of faith, and men and women of science ... I've decided not to oppose this bill," Mr Rudd said in 2006 when he voted to make RU486 available through the Therapeutic Goods Administration.

Professor Clark likened the late-term abortion provisions proposed in the bill, which would allow women to have a termination at any point during their pregnancy as long as two doctors consented, to the persecution of the disabled by the Nazis.

``We have babies being aborted at 24 weeks because mothers can't come to terms with disabilities we can surgically fix, while in the next room we have babies being born at 24 weeks," Professor Clark said.

Victoria's 40 upper house MPs began debating the bill yesterday after it passed through the lower house unamended last month. Its passage through the upper house will be more problematic as MPs from both sides are pushing for amendments.