

UNITED KINGDOM

## Now the Bishops have stepped in to ring to save RS's life

LIFE AND BIOETHICS

22\_01\_2021

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Will the Polish government get RS out of the UK in time to save his life? The diplomatic storm between the Polish and UK governments took a sharp turn yesterday. The Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Zbigniew Rau“ [tweeted](#) on January 21, “with regards to the

matter of the Polish citizen staying in a hospital in Plymouth, Great Britain, I inform you that I am taking all possible steps to have him granted diplomatic status”.

**The Polish citizen, identified only as RS, could be free to leave the country** in the next few hours, but the ball is back in the UK government’s court. They were not held particularly cooperative last December 24, when the Polish government requested help to repatriate the disabled patient for medical treatment in his home country. Sympathisers for RS across the world are now watching closely to see what the U.K. government’s next move will be.

**Two days ago, the President of the Polish Bishops’ Conference** Archbishop Stanislaw Gadecki wrote a stiff letter to his British counterpart, Cardinal Vincent Nichols requesting his support and intervention to save RS’s life. The letter which is [accessible on line](#), retraced significant details of the case, the appeals refused by the ECHR and quoted text from the Church’s magisterium on the sanctity of life while stressing that public opinion in Poland was shocked by the Pole’s treatment in the U.K.

**Yesterday, two Catholic bishops**, Rt Rev John Sherrington, Auxiliary Bishop of Westminster (Bishop for Life) and Rt Rev Mark O’Toole, Bishop of Plymouth, responded to the Polish Archbishop’s plea for help [with a letter](#) to the U.K.’s Minister of Health Matt Hancock on behalf of Cardinal Nichols President of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales. The bishops informed the Health minister that, “the Catholic Church continues to oppose the definition of assisted nutrition and hydration as medical treatment” ..... and that “providing food and water to very sick patients, even by assisted means, is a basic level of care”. The letter also questions the court’s interpretation of RS’s best interests. “We note that Mr RS had not refused food and fluids nor had he expressed any view about not wanting food and fluids in these circumstances and that there was no evidence that he viewed assisted nutrition and hydration as medical treatment”.

The letter ends with a personal message, “On his behalf [Cardinal Nichols], we write to express our opposition to this definition of medical treatment and to convey the offer of the Polish authorities to assist in the transfer of Mr RS to Poland for his future care”.

**The overwhelming public horror in Poland to the case**, has pushed the Polish government and the Polish Church to the front line. The illegal and emotionally charged photos and video footage of the Pole and family members that have circulated on Polish television, in newspapers and on social media, have whipped up a hefty movement of supporters for RS and the birth family members who are waging the legal battle to save him. Moreover, public interest and support in the case continues to rise around the

globe.

**In fact, it was this (mis)use of family photos and video footage** that Mr Justice Cohen made the focus of his address at the beginning of the court hearing on January 18, brought by the NHS Trust to stop the Polish Consul General from having access to RS. He reminded members of the public attending the online hearing that RS's identity including those of his wife, children, birth family and doctors are all protected by the transparency order of December 15. Mr Justice Cohen stated that the publication of the videos was "particularly distressing" and abhorrent. He indicated that he would treat breaches of the transparency order severely. In the U.K., contempt of court carries a custodial sentence of up to two years.

**The complicated and intimidating court restrictions** aimed at protecting the protagonists of this tragedy has rendered the case faceless and nameless in the UK. Media coverage has been so scarce that even in Plymouth where RS is hospitalised alone and dying, few are aware of the international and national litigation and horrific suffering this case has caused for those involved.