

Doctors plan to remove nutrition from disabled Frenchman

Doctors have said they will begin to remove intravenous feeding tubes from Vincent Lambert, though his parents have asked international authorities to intervene to avoid the death of the man, who requires artificial life support due to a severe injury.

"Vincent is not at the end of his life, he is not a vegetable," his mother Viviane Lambert asked the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva July 1, Radio France International reports.

"I beg you, help us," she said. "Without your intervention, my son, Vincent Lambert, will be euthanized because of his mental handicap." She said it would be discriminatory to deprive a disabled person of food and drink.

"He sleeps at night, wakes up during the day, and looks at me when I talk. He only needs to be fed through a special device and his doctor wants to deprive him of this so that he can die, while legal experts have shown that this is not necessary," she said, according to Reuters.

Vincent Lambert, 42, has been a quadriplegic and severely disabled for more than 10 years, after he sustained severe head injuries in a 2008 traffic accident.

Since then, Lambert has been at the center of a protracted court battle over whether to have his food and hydration removed. Lambert's wife and six of his eight siblings have supported the removal of life support, while his parents, reported to be devout Catholics, have fought against it. His wife said Lambert had told her he would not want to be kept alive if in a "vegetative state," but this was never put in writing.

Vincent Sanchez, the main doctor treating Lambert, told his family via e-mail July 2 that he would follow a French court ruling and start to remove life support.

The parents have said they will press murder charges if he is removed from care and hydration, Agence France Presse reported last week.

The UN International Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities asked the French government to keep Lambert alive so it could conduct its own investigation into what his fate should be, but the government rejected this request as non-binding, France24 reports.

Jean Pailot, a lawyer for Lambert's parents speaking at the U.N. event, said that decision was "absolutely scandalous and clearly justifies our presence

here today.”

In May, French President Emmanuel Macron rejected calls to intervene, saying that the decision to stop treatment “was taken after a constant dialogue between his doctors and his wife, who is his legal representative.”

The Court of Cassation ruled June 28 that a lower court did not have the legal competence to order his feeding tubes be reinserted.

A French court had previously ruled in favor of euthanizing Lambert last month. He had been briefly removed from feeding and hydration tubes May 20, when a legal challenge passed the Paris appeals court and the hospital was ordered to return to providing life-sustaining support.

Viviene Lambert said that in May when her son learned about his planned death “he cried.”

“I beg you to intervene with France and remind it of its obligation to not let my son die,” she asked the U.N. human rights council Monday.

Euthanasia is illegal in France. However, a 2005 law allows physicians to refrain from using “disproportionate” treatments “with no other effect than maintaining life artificially.”

In 2015, the European Court of Human Rights approved the removal of Lambert’s life support, arguing in a 12-5 decision that the choice to stop his intravenous feeding did not violate European rights laws.

Catholic medical ethics for treating the severely ill or disabled do not require the use of extraordinary means to preserve life; but does consider the provision of food and hydration to be an ordinary standard of care.

In a joint statement May 21, Cardinal Kevin Farrell, prefect of the Dicastery for Laity, Family, and Life, and Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, president of the Pontifical Academy for Life, said the interruption of food and hydration entail a “serious violation of the dignity of the person.”

Food and water, they continued, are a form of essential care, and do not comprise “unreasonable therapeutic obstinacy.”

Pope Francis addressed Lambert’s case during a *Regina Coeli* address in April 2018. He asked for prayers for people such as Lambert, “who live, at times for a long period, in a serious state of illness, medically assisted for their basic needs.”