

Amnesty International

AI's New Position on Abortion

Amnesty International (AI) has long promoted human rights across the world; internationally, they are the largest and most influential human rights group. Until this year, their position regarding abortion has always been neutral. Their previous policy stated, "AI takes no position on whether or not women have a right to choose to terminate unwanted pregnancies; there is no generally accepted right to abortion in international human rights law."

Unfortunately, in April 2007, Amnesty International's International Executive Committee adopted a policy, which is "to support the decriminalisation of abortion, to ensure women have access to health care when complications arise from abortion and to defend women's access to abortion, within reasonable gestational limits, when their health or human rights are in danger."

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Reactions to New Policy

AI's new support of abortion is obviously causing a divide among many of its allies. U.S. Representative Chris Smith (R-NJ) has reported that a human rights group that favors legalizing abortion is "the ultimate oxymoron."

"This is completely inconsistent with what Amnesty has been about," said John-Henry Westen, a board member of the Campaign Life Coalition, a Toronto-based group representing about 110,000 families. "We consider this an attack on the rights of the unborn."

Bishop William S. Skylstad, president of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), commented on AI's decision:

This basic policy change undermines Amnesty's longstanding moral credibility and unnecessarily diverts its mission. In promoting abortion, Amnesty divides its own members (many of whom are Catholics and others who defend the rights of unborn children) and jeopardizes its support by people in many nations, cultures and religions who share a consistent commitment to all human rights.

Another Catholic bishop, Bishop Michael Evans, spoke of the necessity for him to break his 31-year relationship with AI. He warned that their new policy would "almost certainly divide Amnesty's membership and thereby undermine its vital work."

After AI's announcement, the Irish chapter of Amnesty International announced that it would not promote the group's new abortion policy, citing Irish laws against abortion. However, the *London Times* reported that, "The decision is automatically binding for Amnesty's members in each member country, including those where abortion is illegal." They also stated that, "Amnesty is now likely to put its legal expertise and lobbying power into helping to shape international treaties and agreements that favour legal abortion."



This information has been provided by the Texas Right to Life Educational Fund.
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