



April 20, 2007

Dear Members and Supporters of Amnesty International USA:

As many of you know, Amnesty International is in the midst of a global Campaign to Stop Violence against Women. As part of this campaign, we have advocated for a woman's right to be free from any form of inhuman treatment, cruelty, coercion, discrimination or violence.

Violence against women is pervasive throughout the world. In conflict zones from Bosnia to Darfur, Sudan to Guatemala, rape has been used as a weapon of war. The World Health Organization estimates that one woman in five will be the victim of rape or attempted rape in her lifetime. In Africa, the number rises to one in three women. Women who are raped often suffer additional abuse and isolation from their communities. In some countries abortion carries severe criminal punishment. In Nigeria, a woman who actually had a miscarriage was accused of aborting the fetus and threatened with the death penalty.

Women suffer terrible consequences from unsafe abortions when access to medical treatment is blocked. Every year 70,000 women die from unsafe abortions and another five million suffer serious medical complications, often leading to lifelong disabilities and/or infertility.

If Amnesty International is to be true to its mission to address grave abuses of human rights of physical and mental integrity without discrimination and if Amnesty is to be a credible voice on women's human rights then it cannot remain silent in the face of such suffering.

This grave situation prompted Amnesty International in 2005 to begin consultations with its 74 national sections to evaluate its response to forced and unwanted pregnancy that results from violence or that poses a grave risk to the woman's life or health.

Following these movement-wide consultations, Amnesty International's International Executive Committee recently concluded that Amnesty should no longer remain silent on certain aspects of abortion and has adopted a policy on abortion that:

- Supports women who seek a safe, early medical termination of pregnancy in cases of rape, incest or when a woman's life or health is at grave risk.
- Urges governments to make medical care available to women who suffer complications from unsafe abortions;
- Opposes imprisonment and other criminal penalties for abortion against women or their providers.

This policy follows Amnesty International's long-standing human rights work on issues related to reproductive and sexual health, particularly in the context of our work to stop violence against women. Over many years, for example, we have opposed coerced abortion, sterilization and abortion for sex selection, demanded the prosecution of rape committed as a weapon of war and called for an end to female genital mutilation.

The new policy means that Amnesty International will not campaign for legalization of abortion generally. Nor will we take a position on whether abortion is right or wrong or on laws regulating the termination of pregnancy, and we will not counsel individuals about whether to continue or terminate a pregnancy.

Amnesty International's new policy is the result of a consultation through which a wide range of views have been considered. We believe that one of our greatest strengths as a worldwide movement has been the solidarity forged among people of diverse beliefs who nonetheless share a commitment to ending suffering and who come together to work on human rights issues. We hope that those supporters who may disagree with our decision in this particular instance will continue to join our struggle to protect human rights around the world.

Yours truly,

Larry Cox
Executive Director
Amnesty International USA