



An International Network for Peace, Justice and Life
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May 15, 2006

AN OPEN LETTER TO AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Dear Friends:

We are fellow death penalty abolitionists and admirers of AI's work. We share many members and activists with AI; Scott Schaeffer-Duffy, former coordinator of your campaign against the death penalty in Massachusetts, is a member of our Board. Accordingly, please allow us to add some pertinent information to AI's deliberations on its abortion policy.

The first of AI's three points deals with advocating that women with botched abortions receive adequate medical care. Naturally, anyone who cares about women at all would affirm this. In fact, much of the right-to-life movement's legislative efforts in the United States deals with such matters as requiring that an abortion doctor have admitting privileges at a nearby hospital. You would not necessarily be taking sides in a political debate. At least in the United States, this point alone would not be controversial.

However, AI's points have not covered women's right to aftercare for the psychological needs of those who have been traumatized by abortion -- whether botched or not. In general, it is the pro-life movement that has been left this task. Attempts by abortion clinics have been only occasional and rather shallow. How would it work as a government-guaranteed right?

The AI points have not covered clearly coerced abortions, nor those pressured on teenagers or women who do not want them. You have not covered the practice of sex-selection abortions, which are now so numerous that some countries have an imbalance with millions of women missing. In these cases no one could argue whether abortion itself is clearly violence against women, and no policy could pretend to oppose violence against women while remaining silent on these points.

We ask you to reflect on how much your point #2, and even more your point #3, contradicts your first point. What you are basically saying is that governments have a responsibility to clean up after botched abortions, *but should have no ability to prevent those botched abortions*. They should simply allow the harm to occur, and then deal with it.

Since abortion is a form of killing human beings -- a point that is not religious but biological -- people who engage in it have the psychological reaction to doing it that those killing other people have. Studies have shown that combat veterans who kill seem to have more severe trauma reactions than those who do not, even when controlling for battle intensity. Other studies have shown police who shoot in the line of duty have more severe trauma symptoms than those that are shot at. People who carry out executions appear to have some of the Posttraumatic Stress Disorder symptoms as well. (See the book: *Perpetration-Induced Traumatic Stress: The Psychological Consequences of Killing*, by Rachel M. MacNair, Ph.D., published in 2002 by Praeger.)

A "detachment or estrangement from others" is one of the trauma symptoms. Therefore, if abortion providers are traumatized in the same way that others who kill are -- and preliminary evidence suggests this is quite plausible -- then it follows that the inattention will inevitably lead to botched abortions. Several scandals on legal abortion reported in the press over the years have supported this thesis. We would be happy to send more extensive documentation on these points if you request them and find it relevant to your considerations.

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Child states that every child "needs special safeguards and care, including legal protection, before as well as after birth." (Resolution 1386(XIV) of 20 November 1959, third paragraph of preamble). Is AI deciding to no longer support this human rights document?

We have observed sincere advocates of various positions sabotaging their own goals by being inconsistent. For example, politicians who oppose abortion on grounds of protection of life, yet favor executions or war, have caused others to discredit their views. Likewise those who oppose the death penalty, even with respect to the guilty who have received due process, may be discredited if they advocate laws that allow imposition of the death penalty on innocent children without due process.

We hope you find these reflections helpful.

Sincerely,



Bill Samuel
President, Consistent Life
for the Board of Directors

APPENDIX TO CONSISTENT LIFE OPEN LETTER TO AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

The text below is from a standard communication AI is sending to people who write to them about abortion policy. The points in the third paragraph below are to what we are responding in our letter when we refer to “The first of AI’s three points . . .” and thereafter.

Although AI does not currently take a position on abortion, you are correct that the AI movement is contemplating whether and how to address it.

As you probably already know, our policy agenda, and the policies themselves, are determined by AI members through a democratic process. The reason that abortion is being discussed right now is that members throughout the movement felt that AI's work to stop violence against women and promote women's human rights necessitates that we consider whether a more comprehensive policy on sexual and reproductive rights, potentially encompassing certain abortion-related issues, would enable AI to be more effective in these areas. This was expressed in a decision taken last August at AI's 2005 International Council Meeting (ICM), which is AI's highest decision-making body.

The 2005 ICM decided that AI will develop a policy statement and a strategy for defending and promoting sexual and reproductive rights. At the same time, the ICM decided that an extended consultation process should be undertaken to determine whether AI should adopt a policy on abortion and how such a policy should be formulated. We have just embarked on this process. The first stage involves considering whether and when AI should develop policies on three specific issues that have been identified as particularly urgent in the context of AI's campaign to stop violence against women: 1) access to health care for the management of complications arising from abortion; 2) access to abortion in cases of rape, sexual assault, incest or risk to a woman's life; and 3) the removal of criminal penalties for those who seek or provide abortions.

All other abortion-related issues, including whether a woman's right to physical and mental integrity includes a right to terminate pregnancy, will be considered by the 2007 ICM. The extended timeframe for consultation and decision-making is a reflection of the recognition that these are profound decisions that require reflection and discussion so that the AI movement can move forward as one.