

## Update on Amnesty International's Abortion Rights Policy

Mary Joseph, 25/10/06

Amnesty International are still working towards the adoption of an abortion rights policy at their next International Council general meeting in Mexico in August 2007. This meeting will consider whether the "*right to physical and mental integrity includes [a woman's] right to terminate her pregnancy.*"

Policy is set at the international level only, but involves consultation of national sections. At present, Amnesty International is continuing the consultation process of its 1.8 million members worldwide through the national chapters of AI, canvassing members' views on whether Amnesty should abandon its current neutral position on abortion. Amnesty International's traditional position has always been based on the recognition that there is no generally accepted right to abortion in international human rights law.

Several countries have completed this process and voted on the policy. The Canadian, New Zealand and United Kingdom branches of AI have voted in favour of establishing abortion as a human right. The consultation process in Australia was supposed to have been completed in May this year and Amnesty is currently compiling members' submissions. If you know of any Amnesty supporters who have not yet put a submission to the national office, it may not be too late to do so.

The consultation process internationally was also supposed to have concluded in May, but the results of the consultation are considered confidential by most Amnesty International sections and they are not releasing this information to the media.

Significantly, the United States chapter of AI is understood to be still undertaking the consultation process and pro-life members and supporters of Amnesty, including members of Congress, are working very hard to get their message across at regional conferences and directors meetings. It would be good to pray for the success of the US consultation in protecting life, as the US section will undoubtedly have a big influence on the outcome of the Mexico 2007 meeting.

The recent meeting of Amnesty's International Executive Committee, held in Portugal in July, considered whether to support a limited abortion rights policy, consisting of (i) decriminalisation of abortion (ii) access to health care services following an abortion, whether legal or illegal (iii) access to abortion in cases of rape, incest or risk to the life of the mother. We have not been able to obtain information on the outcome of this meeting, as IEC proceedings are private, but we believe that the IEC supports all three proposals and will recommend to the International Council that they be adopted and probably incorporated into a broader abortion rights policy. The IEC is accountable to the International Council and will present its recommendations to the council at the Mexico meeting in August 2007.

On a more positive note, the British-based Society for the Unborn Child (SPUC) has organised an excellent “Amnesty for Babies” campaign. Their website, [www.spuc.org.uk/lobbying/amnestyforbabies](http://www.spuc.org.uk/lobbying/amnestyforbabies), is updated regularly and contains a great summary of international human rights law and why it protects the unborn child.