

National Justice and Peace Network
Statement concerning Amnesty International
November 2007

The National Justice and Peace Network (NJPN), very much shares the vision of Amnesty International's original mandate, as well as its opposition to violence against women, and NJPN acknowledges the vital work of Amnesty International (AI), over the years. However, any undermining of the fundamental right to life from its defenceless first beginnings is too important to be ignored. It deeply compromises AI's campaign to 'Protect the Human'.

Although AI is not planning to campaign for access to abortion as a general human right, its new policy does involve upholding the right to access to abortion in certain circumstances, and thereby compromises the fundamental right to life. AI admits that this policy will form an important part of its global campaign to 'Stop Violence to Women'.

Rape is a brutal crime against humanity and denies the human rights of the victim. Victims of rape have the right not to be stigmatised for what has been forced on them. If rape results in new life, both the mother and the child's human rights must be honoured. They both have the right to society's support up to birth, and thereafter.

Faced with the dilemma of leaving Amnesty International, or remaining, what should the conscientious advocate of human rights do? Consideration of the following points may help those wondering what to do.

1. Will leaving Amnesty influence it to change its policy? Would the departure of all those with conscientious objections be enough? AI says not, although a big enough boycott probably would.
2. Would remaining in Amnesty lead to a change of policy? Perhaps, but it would depend on a number of factors.
 - 2.1. Those remaining to actively work to change the policy. This is done so much more effectively by a group supporting each other in the struggle.
 - 2.2. That AI's decision making processes are transparent.
 - 2.3. That AI's decision making is democratic. Bruce Kent points out that AI UK voted not to support the original motion. It was when the same proposition was rephrased that it was passed by a narrow majority.
3. Are there precedents that could throw further light on the process of working with an organization or system? Perhaps:
 - 3.1 In recent elections, both here and in the USA, voters have been presented with pro and anti-abortion candidates. Faith leaders have clearly said voting according to a single-issue, ie abortion, is not what they are advising, but that the potential of the whole range of policies of the candidate should be considered.
 - 3.2 Politics in the UK is conducted along Party Political lines. People of faith have been urged by their leaders to engage in politics, with both a big and little 'p' so as to improve how society conducts itself. Most of the parties in the UK have for years supported abortion. Has this stopped people with conscientious objection to abortion joining political parties (perhaps with a view to changing those policies)?

4. If the probity of Amnesty's decision making is in truth not transparent and not democratic, might there still be an argument to remain with Amnesty in order to reform it?
5. If individuals, groups, organisations like ourselves, or indeed the churches, cut themselves from AI, who/what else will be affected? Let us remember that most of the AI groups we belong to, attend and contribute to, similarly did not want AI to change its policy. We would effectively be abandoning them to fight alone within AI to restore the former policy. What is that going to do to our former friendships and working relationships?
6. Supporters of Justice&Peace have a long and honorable tradition of radical engagement with the world,
7. Perhaps it is not less engagement but more that is required.
8. The actions of even a few persistent and committed people can have a profound effect, way beyond what might be expected from their numbers. Leaven in dough comes to mind!
9. Finally, if one leaves AI, which other organizations with similar aims can one turn to that do not have a policy on abortion? NB It is recommended that you examine their aims and objectives and not assume they are the same as Amnesty's in all other respects.

9.1 Action by Christians against Torture – www.acatuk.org.uk

9.2 Medical Foundation - www.torturecare.org.uk

9.3 Christian Solidarity Worldwide - www.csw.org.uk

9.4 Aid to the Church in Need - www.acn.org.uk

NB Catholic Bishops' Conference of England & Wales recently issued a statement principally for the guidance of schools. <http://www.catholic-ew.org.uk/cn/07/071115a.htm>

A number of Arch/Dioceses have also issued statements which are available via their Justice & Peace Commissions or Fieldworkers (see J & P Contacts page):

Liverpool

Shrewsbury

Southwark