



1237 Ralph David Abernathy Blvd. SW
Atlanta, Georgia 30310-1731
Tel: 404.756.2680
Fax: 404.756.2684
Email: info@SisterSong.net
Website: www.SisterSong.net

**Amnesty for Whom? Abortion as a Human Right:
Amnesty International's Big Decision**
© Laura Jiménez, SisterSong
Originally published in *Collective Voices*, Vol. 2 Issue 6, Winter 2007

At its international meeting in Mexico in August 2007, Amnesty International (AI) will decide upon the position the organization will take in regard to supporting certain abortion rights, including whether or not to advocate for better health care for women who have complications from botched abortions and whether to support legalizing abortions in cases of sexual abuse or a pregnancy's risk to the mother's life. It also may pursue the removal of criminal penalties for those who seek or provide abortions.

AI has subsequently been challenged by the Congressional Pro-Life Caucus in a letter signed by 74 members of Congress which states, "...a decision to support or condone abortion would 'significantly undermine Amnesty's reputation and effectiveness.'"

A representative of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops added to the position of the Pro-Life Caucus by urging AI to maintain its neutral position. Deirdre McQuade emphasized, "Amnesty has traditionally served as a courageous voice for the voiceless and ignored populations, it should not now undermine its own mission by, in essence, siding against millions of voiceless humans."

At the same time, the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children (SPUC) launched the Amnesty for Babies before Birth Campaign in the presence of the Holy See's permanent observer to the UN in Geneva, Switzerland. The SPUC will be asking nations to sign the declaration, which upholds the right to life of unborn children. (Independent Catholic News 2006)

SisterSong considers a woman's decision to continue or terminate a pregnancy as a human right that should be protected under international law. This right is fundamental to the struggle for the equality of women worldwide and is a core principle of the Reproductive Justice framework, which SisterSong promotes.

It is particularly disturbing that AI quickly responded to its critics that it "is not debating whether women have the right to terminate pregnancies under any circumstances," emphasizing that it is considering specific circumstances in which it would advocate for abortion rights. While it is admirable that AI would move to protect women seeking abortions in the case of sexual abuse or to save their own lives, it does not address the underlying issue that all women must have the right to control their own bodies, whether as girls, when pregnant or when they are elders.

Additionally, supporting abortion in these particular circumstances also sets up a dichotomy between those women who deserve and those who do not deserve this right. Reproductive Justice is about women's right to have children they choose to have, to choose not to have children, and to parent the

children that they already have, under any circumstance. Wrapped up in these three core elements are struggles for access to quality health care, economic justice, and gender equality.

In SisterSong's perspective, it is the responsibility of organizations such as Amnesty International and other human rights advocates to uphold the rights of all people to their own bodily integrity, and we believe that SisterSong, AI and others should not hesitate in putting this forward as a core part of our visions. As the SPUC puts forward their campaign on Amnesty for Babies, advocates for women also need to stand up and demand that women's rights be respected and protected. Women's rights are human rights and AI should understand these include sexual rights like abortion.