

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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Amnesty International defends access to abortion for women at risk

Amnesty International today firmly stood by the rights of women and girls to be free from threat, force or coercion as they exercise their sexual and reproductive rights.

Responding to a statement from the Vatican, Amnesty International contradicted the claim of Cardinal Renato Martino, head of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, that Vatican funding for Amnesty International would cease. "We have not accepted funds from the Vatican and do not accept funds from any other state in support of our work against human rights violations," said Kate Gilmore, Executive Deputy Secretary General of Amnesty International.

"Millions of people around the world of many faiths and creeds donate to Amnesty International as individuals. Among them are welcome donations from members of the Catholic faith. We hope that Amnesty International's work against torture, against the death penalty and for the proper administration of justice including for women and girls will continue to draw active support from people of conviction the world over," said Kate Gilmore.

Defending the right of women to sexual and reproductive integrity in the face of grave human rights violations, Amnesty International recently incorporated a focus on selected aspects of abortion into its broader policy on sexual and reproductive rights. These additions do not promote abortion as a universal right and Amnesty International remains silent on the rights and wrongs of abortion.

"Amnesty International's position is not for abortion as a right but for women's human rights to be free of fear, threat and coercion as they manage all consequences of rape and other grave human rights violations," clarified Kate Gilmore.

Yesterday Cardinal Martino, through an interview, encouraged Catholics to withdraw support for Amnesty International, claimed that Amnesty International is "promoting abortion rights". Amnesty International's actual policy, however, standing alongside its long-standing opposition to forced abortion, is to support the decriminalisation of abortion, to ensure women have access to health care when complications arise from abortion and to defend women's access to abortion, within reasonable gestational limits, when their health or human rights are in danger.

"Amnesty International stands alongside the victims and survivors of human rights violations. Our policy reflects our obligation of solidarity as a human rights movement with, for example, the rape survivor in Darfur who, because she is left pregnant as a result of the enemy, is further ostracised by her community," said Kate Gilmore.

"We are a movement to protect citizens including the believer but we do not impose beliefs. Ours is a movement dedicated to upholding human rights, not specific theologies. Our purpose invokes the law and the state, not God. It means that sometimes the secular framework of human rights that Amnesty International upholds will converge neatly with the standpoints of certain faith based communities; sometimes it will not."

Amnesty International encouraged the Catholic Church not to turn away from the suffering that women face because of sexual violence and urged the Catholic leadership to advocate tolerance and respect to freedom of expression for all human rights defenders, including Amnesty International, just as Amnesty International will continue to defend the freedom of religion.

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